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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,  
14-4 Princeton, N. J.  
From the Rev. W. B. SPRAGUE, D.D. Sept. 1839.

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T H E

*Christian Casuist:*

O R, A *W.P.*

T R E A T I S E

O F

Conscience.

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*se*  
found and In Three Books:

Written by J. LA PLACETE, Minister  
of the *French Church at Copenhagen.*

Translated into *English* by B. KENNETT,  
Fellow of *Corpus Christi College, Oxon.*

L O N D O N:

Printed for A. and J. CHURCHIL, at  
the *Black-Swan* in *Pater-Noster-Row* ;  
and R. SARE, at *Grays-Inn-Gate* in  
*Holborn.* M D C C V.

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# T H E

## Translator's Preface.

**T**HIS Treatise of the Judicious M.  
PLACETE has been so much Re-  
commended, by Persons of Eminent Learn-  
ing and Piety in our Church, that a Ver-  
sion of it was thought a piece of Respect to  
them, and of Justice to the Publick. It  
has long obtain'd the General Character of  
a Rational, Perspicuous, and Accurate  
Discourse; neither obscur'd with Schola-  
stick Subtilties, nor abandon'd to the un-  
sound and dangerous Glosses of Jesuits on  
the one hand, or of Enthusiasts on the other.  
As to one Chapter, Entituled, Of Ecclesi-  
astical Ordinances; in which Subject so  
great a Difference is made, by the unhappy  
Circumstances of the Foreign Protestant  
Churches, and the happy Establishment of  
our own; a short Account is given of this  
Difference, in some additional Remarks  
on the said Chapter. And tho' for a Tran-  
slator to quarrel with his Author would  
seem neither decent nor wise, yet to rectify  
a particular Question for the obviating of  
Mistakes, is a Liberty not forbidden, by  
a 2 Prudence



## The Translator's Preface.

*Prudence or Good Manners. If in another place, (at the end of the Twenty-first Chapter, Book II.) where M. PLACETE is replying to what was objected by the Author of the Philosophical Commentary, about the Right of punishing for speculative Opinions, he should be judg'd to grant too much to his Adversary ; a favourable Allowance will be made in regard to the chief Subject of that Debate, the Injustice and Cruelty of the Romish Persecutions. The Appendix to the French Edition ; containing a Dispute with M. Nicole, about the Analysis of Faith, is here omitted, as not immediately affecting the main Argument. The Design and Method of the Author are best explain'd in his own Preface : In which, as he has done Justice to our Excellent Bishop Sanderson, by chusing him alone for his Guide, out of all the Tribe of Casuistick Writers ; so, in the ensuing Work, he has Skill enough to work upon so exact a Model, and to proceed by so great a Direction.*

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# THE PREFACE.

**A**Mong the great Variety of Subjects offering themselves to those who undertake to revive and illustrate the Doctrine of *Christian Morals*, there are very few so weighty and important as this of *CONSCIENCE*. *Conscience* is the immediate Rule of our Actions: It is that *Lamp* which ought to direct us in all our Paths, and to enlighten our whole Course of Duty. Again, this is a Subject full of Difficulties, such as are not without much Labour to be surmounted: And these Difficulties have rather been strengthen'd and increas'd, by most Authors that have hitherto attempted their Removal. Lastly, a very numerous train of Errors in this Affair, have spread themselves over the Minds of the People, which we should endeavour, with our utmost Ability, to root out.

So that this, if any Subject, deserves to be consider'd in a particular Treatise: And yet 'tis certain, we have no such

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Treatise in our Language ; none, at least, that has been publish'd by *Protestant* Writers, and in pursuance of our Principles : Nay, there are not many extant in *Latin* ; and as for those few which we have, the Authors never went deep enough into the Enquiries. They were contented with some General Remarks, and suffer'd the main Difficulties to escape untouch'd.

But there is One whom I must always except, and that is Dr. *Sanderson*, some time Divinity-Professor in *Oxford*, and afterwards Bishop of *Lincoln*. This excellent Divine has begun to treat of *Conscience* in such a manner, as would have left nothing for us even to desire or wish, could he have found means to compleat his Labour, and to fill up the Plan which he had laid : But he being oblig'd to leave this Work, when he was but just entred upon it, we may affirm, that it has not been carried to a sufficient height ; which is the Reason that has induc'd me to lend my Hand to the Service.

Not that I pretend to be possess'd of all those Advantages that are necessary to the Accomplishment of so great an Under-



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Undertaking. I am too well acquainted with my self, to entertain such an Imagination: But I conceiv'd it might be better for the World, to make use of that little which I could perform, than to be wholly destitute of all Assistance in this Kind.

It may not be amiss to advertise the Reader, that he ought carefully to distinguish between a *Treatise*, or *Discourse*, of *Conscience*, and a compleat Body of what we usually term *Cases of Conscience*: The former does not compose the thirtieth part of the latter; as will appear to any who shall but cast his Eye upon the first Casuistical Writer that comes in view.

The Custom has been to prefix those *Discourses of Conscience* to these larger Works, and to make them serve for an Introduction to *the Cases*; treating of the Nature of Humane Actions; of their Rules and Principles; of Good Works; of Sins in General, and Special; of Moral and Christian Vertues; and of many the like Topicks, which I have purposely declin'd. I have limited my self in a stricter manner to *Conscience* only; and have explain'd its Nature, its Rules, its

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Duties,

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## The PREFACE.

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Duties, the Care that ought to be employ'd about it, and the several Estates or Conditions of which it is capable.

'Tis true, I have touch'd upon some Matters in the First Book, each of which deserv'd a distinct Labour ; as Contracts, Oathes, Restitution, &c. I doubt not but many will censure what I have deliver'd on these Heads as very short and superficial : But I entreat them to consider, the Obligation I was under of thus proceeding. And in order to this, to observe, That each of these three things may be taken in three several Respects : 1. As it is *in it self*. 2. As it is the *Object* of Conscience. 3. As it is the *Rule* of Conscience ; and that each Respect ought to be handled in a different way,

For Instance ; Contracts, or Covenants, consider'd *in themselves*, and according to their proper Nature, are the Subject of *Law*, and do not fall within the Scope of *Divinity*. Considered as the *Object* of Conscience, they form a peculiar part of Morality, in which a Thousand Questions are debated, that I have not so much as propos'd : But if we consider them barely  
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as the *Rule* of Conscience, a few Reflections will satisfy us about them : And since I here consider them in no other regard, I thought a single Chapter might suffice, not intending to debar those who seek a fuller Information from consulting such Authors as have search'd them to the bottom, and drawn them out to their just extent.

Others, on the contrary, will alledge, that I have dwelt too long on the Subject of *Peace of Conscience*. I would have avoided the doing so, had I written in *Latin*, and for the Use of the Learned : But intending my Discourse for the Benefit of Ordinary Capacities, I thought it proper to contribute my poor Endeavours, towards the setting this Matter in its due Light ; Men being often prepossess'd with a very dangerous Mistake on the Occasion, which I could not be too careful in opposing and defeating.

They are wont to confound Peace of Conscience with Security ; that is, the best and happiest Estate in the World, with the most fatal and miserable : They think our bare Acknowledgement, That God is infinitely Merciful ; and  
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that his Blessed Son has made a perfect Satisfaction, and Propitiation for our Sins by his Blood, sufficient to quiet and allay the justest Fears that can rise in our Hearts, upon the Remembrance of our past Offences. They suppose it needless to examine, whether we really have those Dispositions which are required, e're we can be admitted to this Mercy, or can feel the saving Vertue of this Precious Blood. It being obvious, that Multitudes every Day Miscarry, and are lost, through so pernicious a Conceit, I judge that I ought to omit nothing which might tend to the Confutation of it. 'Twas this engag'd me in such a Length, as by some may be thought tedious, though to me it appear'd necessary. — God grant that the whole may succeed to his Glory, and to our Salvation.

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O F  
CONSCIENCE.

BOOK I.

Of the Nature, and the Rules of  
CONSCIENCE.

CHAP. I.

*Whether Conscience be properly defin'd &  
clear and evident Perception?*

**T**HERE's no Man but talks of Conscience: And this Word is alike familiar to the Learned and Ignorant. Yet will it be found highly difficult, precisely to determine its Signification; especially, because Divines, instead of removing the Difficulty, (as it was their Office, and their Intention to do) have rather promoted its Increase, by falling into opposite Opinions, and so giving Birth to those Contests which remain undecided at this Day.

Some Professors of great Name, have lately defin'd Conscience to be, That inward  
A Light;

Light, by the help of which, we clearly and distinctly perceive, whatsoever is evident, either within, or without us; those Truths not excepted with which Religion and Morality seem least of all concern'd; such as *Two and Two are Four*; *the Whole is greater than any One of its Parts*; which are the Instances they produce on the Occasion.

They do not expressly tell us, whether by this Light they mean, the Evidence of the Objects which we perceive, or the Perception it self, which is the Effect of that Evidence. But, no doubt, they understand the one or the other of these things, or possibly, both of them together.

Now, since there's no room for Deception, in case we are guided only by Evidence, and affirm nothing but upon a clear and distinct View, these Authors Conclude, from their Definition, That Conscience is infallible; and Assert, That the Errors into which Men so often fall, are by no means Acts of Conscience, but Natural Effects of their Prejudice and Precipitation, and of their Negligence in the search of Truth.

But they still go farther, and alledge, That to accuse the Conscience of Deception, is to say, that God himself deceives us, and to undermine all Faith and Religion, while, by this means, we destroy the Grounds of Certainty, and introduce Universal Scepticism in its place.

Other Divines of eminent Character, have form'd a quite different Notion of Conscience, and have maintain'd, That in whatsoever its precise Nature consists, it is certainly very capable



capable of being deceiv'd. But tho' both Sides are desirous, that this Dispute should pass for a matter of high Importance and equal Reality, it seems to me, like many others, to be founded barely upon a Mistake, or to be only a Question of Words, which can never tend to any great, or solid Use.

Let us abstain one Moment, from the Term Conscience, and let us only ask, Whether 'tis possible we should be deceiv'd, while we affirm nothing but upon a clear and distinct Perception? The Question thus proposed will have no manner of Difficulty. All the World will return the same Answer to it; all the World will pronounce the thing impossible; all will agree, that Evidence is the great Mark and Characteristick of Truth; all will agree, that this is the Foundation of Certitude, and that to maintain the contrary, is to open a Way for Scepticism, and to banish Faith and Religion from amongst Men.

Let it be demanded, on the other Side, Whether we are not frequently mistaken, in the Judgments we make of our Actions, either affirming them to be Good, at the same time when they are Evil; or pronouncing them Evil, at the same time when they are Good, or Indifferent? No Man will hesitate upon this Point: All will confess what All, too often, experience.

Thus the Parties are agreed in the main, and all the Dispute is, which of the two, Whether this Perception of Self-evident Things, or this Light by which we perceive them, has the better Title to the Name of

Conscience? But is not this one of those Verbal Controversies, which have so little Pretension to exercise the Enquiries of the Learned and Judicious?

Let the Word Conscience be applied to denote all sorts of Perceptions, whether clear or obscure; what Inconvenience can ensue, provided the Persons, to whom we direct it, are assured that we intend it in this Sense?

I may add, That we are not barely permitted thus to use the Word, but that there is some kind of necessity for our thus using it; my Reason is, because (by the Confession of those who differ from us,) the common People never use it in any other manner. Now this Argument is sufficient, it being an establish'd Maxim, that *We ought to Think with the Learned, and Speak with the Vulgar*; Sentiendum cum Doctis, & loquendum cum Vulgo.

And yet the Vulgar are not the only Persons who thus express themselves; the Divines of all Communions, if we except those few with whom we are now concern'd, are wont to speak the same Language, as appears from those Phrases of an *Erroneous* Conscience, a *Scrupulous* Conscience, a *Doubling* Conscience, and a *Probable* Conscience, which occur in the Writings of them All. They All maintain, That our Conscience has but very rarely a clear and distinct view of the Good or Evil, in any Action.

Lastly, The Holy Scripture, which ought to be the Rule of our Expressions, as well as of our Faith, often uses the Word Conscience,  
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in a quite different Sense from what these late Authors would impose upon it. Thus St. Paul had no manner of regard to evident Perceptions, when he declared, that *the Blood of Christ purifies our Conscience, from the dead works of Sin.* He likewise took the *Heb. ix.* Word in quite another Sense, when he spake of a *seared Conscience*, of a *weak Conscience*, of a *Conscience that is defiled.*

I believe therefore, on the one side, that this Term is too much restrain'd, if we allow it only to denote such Acts as are clear and evident; and, on the other side, that it is stretch'd a little too far, if we enlarge its Object to the things without us, such as the Instances before alledg'd; *Two and Two are Four; The Whole is greater than any One of its Parts.* I readily grant, that the Conscience may have for its Object the Perception of these Truths, but not that it can have the Truths themselves. When I say to my self, *Two and Two are Four*, I am sensible of my saying so; and my being thus sensible, is an Act of Conscience. But the direct Act is of another Nature, and belongs properly to Intuitive Knowledge.

If what I have offer'd on this Subject be not embrac'd, I hope it will at least be granted me, that the Reasons of those, whom I oppose, are by no means convincing: they urge, That if the Conscience may be deceived, we may then impute our Errors to God who gave us our Conscience; that there will be then no Dependence on what it avers; we shall have reason to doubt of all things; Certainty will be banished the World, and



Scepticism will insolently triumph over Religion.

Now this reasoning is capable of three different Senses, which it greatly imports us not to confound. The first Sense is this: We can deny none of the Consequences alledg'd, if Conscience, taken after the Notion of these late Divines, may be deceiv'd, that is, may be capable of Error in clear, distinct, and evident Perceptions.

The Second is this: These Effects will become necessary, if Conscience, taken in the Notion of all other Divines, may be deceiv'd; that is, may be capable of Error in those Judgments, whether clear or obscure, confused or distinct, which we pass on our own Actions.

The Third Sense is this: We shall be obliged to admit the said Consequences, if we are suffer'd to use the Word in this second Notion, including all sorts of Judgments that we can pass on our own Actions.

Of these three Senses, the first is most true and certain, and I know not any that will contest it. The second is notoriously false, and I know not any that will defend it. The Third is not only false, but absurd and ridiculous. For it supposes this Word to be a Term of Magick, or to be somewhat more than Magical, in that it changes the Natures of all Subjects, and allows nothing to continue in its present State and Condition.

But it will be ask'd, if Conscience may be deceiv'd, how shall we know that it is not deceiv'd in any particular Instance? I answer,

swer, We shall know this by the Clearness, or the Obscurity of its Perceptions. If they are obscure, we have reason to fear that 'tis deceiv'd: If they are clear, we may assure our selves that 'tis not deceiv'd. This is no more than what the same Authors affirm: So that the only difference between us is, That they would appropriate the Name of Conscience to clear and evident Perceptions, while I would rather extend it to all sorts of Perceptions terminated in our own Actions. We agree, therefore, as to the Thing, and dispute only about the Word.

For my own part, I would avoid all such Contentions, as to bare Terms, if these Gentlemen would be satisfied with giving them what Sense they pleas'd, without drawing the Sense of other Men into such odious Consequences, as must be detested by the whole World. Let them suffer us to speak, as all Mankind have ever spoken, and let them enjoy their own novel way of Expression. We should do them but too much Honour, if we Excepted, in the least, against this Peculiarity.

## C H A P. II.

*Whether Conscience be an Act, or an Habit, or a Faculty?*

**T**HERE is a second Dispute, concerning the Nature of Conscience, which has too near an Affinity with the former. One Party of Divines affirms Conscience to be, that Natural Faculty which judges of our Actions; the Understanding, according to some, according to others the Will. A second Party maintains, That it does not consist in this Faculty; but in those Habits, whether infused, acquired, or natural, which supplie this Faculty: and lastly, A Third Party will have it to be neither the Faculty, nor the Habits, but those Acts which proceed from both. The Ground of which diversity in Opinion, is only the supposing this Word Conscience to have but one Sense, or, to denote but one individual thing: yet nothing is more false than such a Supposition. The Word is equivocal, and signifies three things, which must be own'd to be very different. 1. The Faculty which judges of our Actions; that is, either the Understanding or Will; the former, if we take the way of the Schools, and distinguish three Operations in that Faculty, Apprehension, Judgment, and Ratiocination: and the latter, if we choose to follow the Modern Philosophers, who allow the Understanding no more than the first of these Operations, ascribing



cribing the two others to the Will. 2. Those Opinions, and other Perswasions, true or false, which prepossess this Faculty, and determine it to pass right, or wrong Judgments. 3. The Judgments themselves which this Faculty pronounces.

The Holy Scriptures, the Learned, and indeed all Men in general, occasionally use the Word according to all three Acceptations.

First, The Holy Scriptures often speak of the Conscience, as of a Faculty: For, in some places, they call it the *Soul*, but almost every where the *Heart*. The *Hebrew* has perhaps no other Term to express it by but this latter, which is therefore generally applied to it, throughout the Series of the Old Testament: nor do we want Examples of the same kind in the New; witness that Passage of St. John, *If our Heart Condemn us, God is greater than our Heart.* But now, every one knows, that in the Language of Scripture, the *Heart* always imports, either the Understanding, or the Will, or, perhaps, both those Faculties in Conjunction.

The same Scriptures do sometimes also apply the Terms of the *Spirit*, or the *Mind*, to denote the Conscience; thus, when St. Paul says, *No Man knoweth the things of a Man, but the Spirit of Man which is in him;* when he gives that Charge to the Romans: *Let every Man be fully persuaded in his own Mind;* and when he observes to Titus, concerning Unbelievers, that *even their Mind and Conscience is defiled:* by this Spirit and Mind, He certainly understands the Conscience,

science, and thus all Interpreters agree. But here again, every one knows, that both these Words are expressive of a Faculty.

When the same Apostle assures us, that  
*Heb. ix.* *the Blood of Christ purifies our Consciences from*  
*14.* *dead Works*; 'tis plain, that by Consciences he means neither Acts, nor Habits; he means, no doubt, the Faculties of the Soul, or the Soul it self; which, according to the best Philosophy, is not distinct from its own Faculties.

But farther still, the Scriptures represent the Conscience as subsisting after it has lost its Habits, and when it ceases to produce any Act. 'Tis this which they stile an *hardened Conscience*, and a *seared Conscience*; so that the Ground and Foundation of Conscience, being thus a different thing from its Acts, or Habits, must, by Consequence, be a Faculty.

When we say, that the Conscience dictates, or suggests any thing, that it judges, that it condemns, that it upbraids, that it strikes with Grief and Remorse; we use the Word still in the same Sense. For if by Conscience we here understood any one of its Acts, what we said would really amount to this, the Judgment judges, &c. which would be ridiculous; whereas these Expressions are very just and rational, if we mean the Faculty, from which those several Acts proceed.

Lastly, when we speak of a *knowing*, and of an *ignorant* Conscience, we plainly intend this first Sense of the Word, and cannot expound it either of Acts or Habits.



On the other side, 'tis very certain, that this Word is sometimes applied to Habits. In which sense, no doubt, St. Paul design'd it, when he inform'd *Timothy*, that *some having put away a good Conscience, as concerning Faith, had made Shipwreck.* For the good Conscience, which these unhappy Persons had put away, could not be either the Understanding, or the Will; Faculties never to be lost, or dismiss'd. It was no other than those Habits, with which their former Propensions to Saving Truth (how slight and imperfect soever,) had adorn'd these Faculties. 1 Tim. i. 19.

When Divines affirm, That we ought to rid our selves of an Erroneous Conscience; (*Conscientia errans est deponenda*) they certainly take the Word in this second Sense. For, indeed, what can they mean by this Erroneous Conscience which they would have us lay aside, but those Errors which we have hitherto entertain'd?

Thirdly, This Word sometimes denotes a bare Act: *Conscience* is one sort of Knowledge, or *Science*, as its Name declares; and St. Paul sometimes uses Knowledge for Conscience, as in those Words to the *Romans*: *I know, and am perswaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean of it self.* Rom. xiv. 14.

The same Apostle, elsewhere, makes the Thoughts; and the Conscience, equivalent Terms: as when he says of the *Gentiles*, that *their Conscience bears them witness, their Thoughts in the mean while accusing, or else excusing one another.* Rom. ii. 15. And whoever doubted but that the Thoughts were properly Intellectual Acts?

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When we say, that he who lyes speaks against his Conscience; and when we term those Sins which Men commit knowing them to be Sins, Sins against Conscience, we take the Word in this last Sense. For this Conscience which Men contradict and oppose, by saying what they know to be false, or by doing what they know to be forbidden, is nothing else but an actual knowledge of the Truth in one Case, and of the Divine Prohibition in the other.

The last Acceptation is, if I mistake not, the most proper and natural of the three. The Word is originally Latin, and derived from *Conscius*, which in its primary Signification, denotes one that is privy to any secret Design, as an Accomplice, or Partner, in a Conspiracy; but afterwards it was brought to signify the Knowledge we have of that which passes within our selves: and thus, *Conscius mihi sum*, was, *I am witness to my self*. Hence the Name of Conscience was easily form'd, which imports, sometimes, the Knowledge we have of the Designs of others, sometimes that which we have of our own Counsels and Designs; First, and especially with regard to Fact, and then Secondarily, with regard to Right.

Thus, by degrees, this Term, which properly signifies the Knowledge of what is past, or present, came to be extended to Futurities: every one using it to express the Knowledge we have of the Good or Evil of what we are about to do, or, in general, the Knowledge of our Duty. Nay, the Signification of the Word, has been yet carried farther,

farther, and applied to the Faculty it self, which is the Subject, or the Principle of this Knowledge: Some Instances of which Sense I produced but now, from the Holy Scriptures.

This Word, therefore, has had the fate of many others, which, without losing their first and natural Sense, have in time acquired new Additional Significations. The Word *Prophet*, for Example, denotes strictly and originally, a Foreteller of things to come; for 'tis of *Grecian* Extract, and will bear no other Sense in its Formation. Yet, at length, it was transfered to signify a bare Preacher, as *St. Paul* has sometimes made use of it. The same Apostle has extended it to those who are the Hearers of Preaching, or to those who Sing the Praises of God in the Congregations; it being necessary to affix the one or the other of these Senses to what he says of the Women, *prophesying without their Heads covered*.

These Remarks are the more material, in that they let us see the Weakness of an Argument, on which some have laid a great stress. Conscience, say they, is a Species of Knowledge; therefore an Erroneous Conscience is impossible, because Knowledge is directly opposite to Error. But this Reasoning is of no manner of force: Conscience in its primary Signification, is owned to be a Species of Knowledge; but in another Sense it is the Faculty which judges of our Actions, and which sometimes succeeds happily in its Judgments, at other times not. In the former Case it is a Right Conscience,

science, in the latter an Erroneous Conscience.

So that by the same Rule, we might Argue thus: To Prophecy is to foretel future Events; the Women of *Corinth* prophesied, therefore the Women of *Corinth* foretold future Events.

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### C H A P. III.

#### *Three Definitions of Conscience, with some Divisions.*

FROM what I have said, it will appear no difficult matter to know what Definition we ought to assign to Conscience; for this wholly depends upon the knowing, in which of the three Senses before mention'd, we take the Word.

If taken in the first Sense, Conscience is that natural Faculty, by which we judge of our Actions, and of their Consequences, both with regard to our Duty, and to our Salvation which depends upon it.

If taken in the second, Conscience is an assemblage of those practical Notices, whether true, or false, infus'd, acquired, or natural, which determine us in the Judgments we pass within our selves upon our Actions and their Consequence.

Lastly, if taken in the third Sense, Conscience is a Judgment, true or false, by which we pronounce upon three sorts of Questions;



Questions; upon those of *Fact*, by saying, 'tis true, or false, that we have done, or omitted such an Action; upon those of *Right*, by saying, that an Action done, or to be done, is Good, Evil, or Indifferent; and upon those which belong to the *Consequences* of our Actions, by saying, they are such as entitle us to the Love, or to the Hatred of God, and to the Effects of this Love, and this Hatred, whether Temporal or Eternal.

I am much deceived, if these three Definitions do not very sufficiently explain the Nature of Conscience; yet it may not be amiss to make some Reflections upon them, in their Order.

In the first Definition, when I affirm Conscience to be that Natural Faculty by which we judge of our Actions, I express my self thus, that I may keep clear from the Disputes of the Philosophers, of whom some will have the *Judgment* to be an Act of the Understanding, others a Function of the Will. Which soever it be of these two Faculties that *Judges*, 'tis that we term Conscience.

It is necessary to add, that Conscience is not this Faculty consider'd either absolutely in it self, or as the Principle of all the Actions produc'd by it. But 'tis this Faculty, consider'd as judging of our Actions, and of their Consequences.

I say, of our *Actions*, not restraining the Term to that narrow Sense which it bears when we distinguish between Actions, Words and Thoughts, but in its more extended

tended and general meaning, as it comprehends all that we think, or speak, or do.

I say we judge of these Actions with regard to our Duty, and to our Salvation which depends upon it; because indeed, we may pass other Judgments on these Actions which shall by no means be Acts of Conscience. Thus we may make Reflections on Natural Philosophy, Physick or Law, &c. But these Reflections have no affinity with Conscience, at least in the present acceptation of the Word.

Lastly, I say, Conscience judges as well of the Consequences of our Actions as of our Actions themselves; because these are properly the two Objects of Conscience. The generality of Divines consider it only with regard to our Actions. But 'tis certain, that it pronounces likewise upon whatsoever may happen to us by means of our Actions; nothing being more common than to speak in this Sense, of the Terrors and Alarms of Conscience, on the one side, and of its Tranquility and Peace on the other.

Upon the second Definition it is to be observed, that in the Judgments which we form of our Actions; or of our State, we are not always guided by certain and indubitable Knowledge. Errors and Prejudices are things which too frequently mislead us. A *Romanist*, for instance, is no less determin'd to worship the *Host*, by the Error of Transubstantiation, which he has imbib'd, than he is to worship God by that solid and certain Perswasion which he has concerning the Necessity of this Duty. He follows the  
Dictates

Dictates of his Conscience in both Cases ; but with this difference, that in the first he suffers himself to be perverted by an abused Conscience ; in the second, he is guided by a Conscience truly right and well inform'd. This induced me to say, that Conscience, in the second Sense, was an assemblage of those Notices, true, or false, which determine us in the Judgments we make of our Actions.

I added, that these Notices might be either infus'd, acquir'd, or Natural. By the infused, I mean those which we derive from Faith, being perswaded that this Virtue is an Effect of Grace, a Fruit, and Production of the Holy Spirit.

By acquir'd Notices, I mean those which are the Fruit of Human Labour ; such, for Instance, as we obtain by Reading and Meditation. I call those Natural Notices which are common to all Mankind, and in respect of which St. Paul affirms, that *the Gentiles do by Nature the things contained in the Law, and shew the Work of the Law, written in their Hearts.* Rom. ii. 14.

As to the third of these Definitions, it may be proper to intimate, in the first place, that when I affirm Conscience to be a Judgment, I do not take this latter Word as it is used in common Speech, to denote the Office of a Judge pronouncing upon a disputed Case. I know 'tis usual to say, that Conscience is a Judge, a Witness, and an Accuser. But besides, that these Expressions are Metaphorical, and therefore very unfit to enter into Definitions, where exact

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propriety



propriety and clearness are so necessary ; besides this, I say, if I thus used the Word, I could only apply it to some particular and special Acts of Conscience ; whereas I ought to comprehend them All. I take it therefore in the Sense of the Schools, as it imports either an Affirmation, or a Negation.

I say this Judgment is true, or false, because there is a twofold Judgment, the one right, the other erroneous ; the former such as pronounces agreeably to Truth ; the latter such as misjudges, declaring that which is Evil to be Good, or that which is Good to be Evil.

I say this is an internal Judgment, or such as we pronounce within our selves : not that I pretend it loses its Nature when it comes to be outwardly expressed, but because I would observe, that its Essence consists in being inwardly pronounc'd, and that all besides is purely accidental to it.

When I say, the Conscience pronounces upon three Sorts, or Orders of Questions, I refer to what has been observ'd concerning its double Object, our Actions, and that which may happen to us on account of our Actions. Actions are of two Sorts ; such as have been done, and such as are to be done. 'Tis with regard to the first Sort, that Conscience is sometimes styled an Accuser, a Witness, a Judge, and an Executioner. 'Tis in reference to the second, that we sometimes style it a Law written, or graven in the Heart, an Impression of the Hand of God, teaching us what we ought to perform, and what to avoid.

With

With regard to the former kind, or to past Actions, Conscience pronounces both upon *Fact* and *Right*. As to *Fact*, it decides whether it be true that we have done such an Action, or have not done it. As to *Right*, it determines the Quality of our Actions, declaring them Good, or Evil, or Indifferent. With regard to future Actions, it pronounces only upon *Right*.

What I have here offer'd, does not only discover to us the Nature of Conscience in general, but also the particular nature of some of its Species. For thus, we distinguish Conscience, first into *Right* and *Erroneous*; and secondly, into *Antecedent* and *Subsequent*, as it has for its Object either past Actions, or future. But now, what has been lately said contributes much to the clearing up of both these Divisions.

There is a third Division, taken from the Motives that determine the Conscience, and from the Impression which they make upon our Mind. For in some Cases, we have a distinct apprehension of the Truth; in others, we proceed only upon Probability and Conjecture. Others again, there are, in which the equality of Reasons on both sides hinders us from inclining to either. And lastly, there are those, in which tho' we embrace one side, and have solid Reasons for our so doing, yet we are still under some fear and apprehension of being deceiv'd, because some slight and petty Reasons continue to strike upon our Mind, to which we allow more weight than they deserve. Hence has Conscience been divided into

four Kinds; a *firm and resolv'd* Conscience, a *probable* Conscience, a *doubting* Conscience, and a *scrupulous* Conscience.

Again, some there are who fright themselves with mere Phantoms and Shadow of Evil; and these, we say, are Men of *weak* and *tender* Consciences.

Some are naturally dispos'd to judge hardly of their own Actions; these are *timorous* Consciences. Others, on the contrary, are scar'd at nothing, nor feel the least remorse from the greatest Irregularities. These are the *fear'd* Consciences taken notice of by St. Paul.

When we judge favourably of our Actions, or rather, when we so judge upon sufficient Reason, we are then said to have a *good* Conscience, as we have an *evil* Conscience, when we condemn our own Actions, and have reason to condemn them.

There is scarce any one of these Species of Conscience, about which there are not several particular Questions to be discuss'd; but such as will better fall in our way hereafter. 'Tis necessary, first, to speak of that which affects them all in common, I mean, the Rules which they are obliged to follow in their Judgments.



## C H A P. IV.

*Of the Rules of Conscience; what these Rules are; That the first, and chief of them is the Will of Ged.*

FROM all that has been hitherto said, it appears, that Conscience must necessarily be seated in one or the other of these three things; either in the Judgment which we make of our Actions, or in the Faculty which pronounces this Judgment, or in the Light which it follows in pronouncing: So that Judgment, we see, is always essential to Conscience.

The Subjects on which Conscience pronounces are of two sorts. Some there are which appear evident of themselves, and strike upon our inward Sense and Perception, with their own proper Lustre. There are others more obscure, and farther removed from our Discovery. The Conscience wants no assistance or direction to pronounce upon the former; it is sufficiently guided by their native Evidence. And this often happens to it, in regard of Fact, and sometimes also with respect to Right.

But when it has to do with Subjects of the latter kind, it stands in need of some External Light to conduct it. It has need of one or more Rules by which it may steer. It has need of some standing Law, the decisions of which it may apply to the particular Subjects that come under its Cognisance.

This is what may especially be observ'd with regard to Questions of Right; for Example, The Point in debate is, Whether an Action done, or to be done, is Good, Evil or Indifferent? How is it possible, that the Conscience should decide in which of these Orders or Classes the Action is to be plac'd, if it have not some test or standard, by the help of which it may distinguish those of any one Order, from those of the other two? And what Mark, what Test, or Standard can it have, whereby to make this Discernment, but the agreement or disagreement of such Actions with some Law, the observation of which may render them Good, the Transgression Evil?

The Rules of Conscience therefore, are the same with those of Action. We ought to follow but one Light, both in doing and in pronouncing upon what we have done, or are about to do. Thus nothing is so highly important in the whole Affair of Conscience, as a full understanding of those Rules, to which it should always endeavour to conform it self; and 'tis in the illustration of this Point only, that I design to employ the remaining part of this first Book.

To speak properly and accurately, our Conscience has no other Rule but the Will of God, according to that of the Prophet, *To the Law and to the Testimony, if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light in them*; and that of the Apostle, *There is one Law-giver, who is able to save and to destroy*.

Isai viii.  
20.

Jam. iv.  
12.

In this Apostolical Maxim, the latter Words declare the reason of the former. It appears that God alone can give Laws to the Conscience, inasmuch as he alone is able to destroy or save. Indeed it would be inconsistent with good Sense, to affirm that he was capable of making Laws, if he had not power to take Cognisance of their Observation, or Infraction, and to reward those who should obey them, or punish those by whom they should be contemn'd. If then, there be any Legislator to whom our Conscience is Subject, it is necessary that this Legislator should inspect, and, as it were, *read* our Conscience, and be fully acquainted with all its Acts and Motions, in order to his recompensing such of them as should be conformable, and the avenging such of them as should be opposite to his Laws. But since these Acts, and these Motions, are open to God alone, and since no Power but his is sufficient for their Reward, or Punishment, it seems manifest, that to Him alone the Conscience is properly and directly under subjection.

Yet inasmuch as God commands us to yield Obedience to others; as Children to their Parents, Servants to their Masters, Subjects to their Sovereigns, and Christians to their Spiritual Guides; it's plain, that the Will of Parents, of Masters, of Princes and Magistrates, and of the Governours and Pastors of the Church, are, in their respective Order and Manner, so many Rules to which we ought to study a conformity in



in our Actions, and which the Conscience ought to follow in its Judgments.

Again, since it is the Will of God, that we should keep our Promises and Covenants, and above all, that we should religiously observe our Oaths; lastly, since he has commanded us to make Reparation for the Injuries we have done: 'tis evident, that these Promises, these Covenants, these Oaths, and even these Injuries do each of them, after their proper manner, oblige our Conscience, and compose another System of Rules for the Government of our Actions.

The Rules of Conscience then, are of two kinds. First, There is a Primitive, Original, and Independent Rule, which binds us, of it self, and by its own proper Authority: Such a Rule is the Divine Will. Secondly, there are other Rules derived from, and depending on this: Such is, on the one side, the Will of those whom God commands us to obey; and on the other side, our own Engagement, which we contract by Word, or Deed.

The Subordination of these Secondary Rules to the Primary is visible; because whensoever the Commands of Men, or our own Engagements, interfere with the Will of God, and lead us to the doing of those things which displease Him, they cease to be of any Validity or Obligation.

When I speak of the Will of God, I mean not the *Will of Decree*, by which he has positively resolv'd to do this or that, whether by himself or by us. This Will may very properly be the Rule of his Actions, according

cording to that of the Scripture, *He doth whatsoever pleaseth Him, in Heaven, and in the Earth*; but it cannot be the Measure of ours, because it is generally unknown to Men: We are then only oblig'd to conform to it, when it discovers it self by the Event. It is our Duty then to acquiesce, with a profound Humility, in all the Divine Disposals, whether agreeable or repugnant to our own Inclinations and Desires.

I mean therefore, that *Will of Precept* or Command, in which, God has prescribed to us what we ought to do, and which has rather our Duty than our Actions, for its proper Object. I would say, that by it God Wills formally and immediately, not our doing what he commands (for then our Obedience must follow necessarily and infallibly) but our being obliged to do it. And thus 'tis Will always obtains its Effect: For whatsoever God has commanded, it is our Duty to perform, whether we actually perform it or not.

This Will is the constant and inviolable Rule of Action to the Holy Angels, as the Psalmist testifies: *Bless the Lord ye his Angels, Psal. ciii. that excel in Strength, that do his Commandments, hearkning to the Voice of his Word: Bless ye the Lord, all ye his Hosts, ye Ministers of his that do his Pleasure.* The same Will was a Rule of Action to our Lord himself, a Rule to which He submitted with the greatest Alacrity and Joy. *My Meat* (says he) *is to do the Will of my Father which has sent me, and to finish his Work.* John iv. 34.

And

And is it not most highly reasonable, that *we* should conform our Actions to a Rule, which now directs those of the Angels, as it once did those of our Blessed Saviour? *We* who have neither those Lights, nor that Integrity and Holiness which shone in our Blessed Redeemer, or which adorn those Pure and Immortal Spirits?

But farther, This Will is most infinitely Wise, and most inflexibly Just; that which ever follows Justice, or rather, that which has Justice for its constant and necessary Attendant; insomuch, that we must be guilty of a manifest Contradiction, should we suppose it capable of Injustice, Obliquity or Irregularity, in any one of its proper Objects.

It is a Will transcendently Good, and truly Beneficial to those whose Obedience it requires; which at the same time that it renders them more Virtuous and more Accomplish'd, renders them also more eminently Happy and Blessed

It is the Will of a Creator, to which the Creatures ought by consequence to submit. It is the Will of a Master, and shall the Servant presume to disobey it? It is the Will of a Father, of the most tender and indulgent Father, is it not therefore what the Children are oblig'd most gladly to embrace, most dutifully to perform?

CHAP.



## C H A P. V.

*What are the General Acts of the Divine Will?*

THIS Will of God, of which we speak, has properly but three General Acts, Commands, Prohibitions, and Permissions. The first oblige us to do, the second not to do, the third leave us to our own Choice of doing or not doing. The Command renders an Action Good, the Prohibition renders an Action Evil, the Permission causes an Action to become Indifferent; I mean, Indifferent in its kind; for otherwise, I confess, there's no deliberate Action, which considered in its own individual Nature, and with all its attending Circumstances, is not either Good or Evil.

As for those things which the Church of Rome is pleased to call *Evangelical Counsels*, such as propose to Men a Perfection towards which it is good indeed to aspire, but which may innocently be neglected, we ought to be very cautious how we admit them.

We may suppose these Counsels to be directed towards a double Object. The first is a degree of Virtue, Piety and Holiness, more eminent, and therefore more commendable, and more pleasing to God than an Integrity of the ordinary height and standard; and yet at the same time of so little necessity,

necessity, that we may not only be saved without acquiring it, but may even voluntarily decline and relinquish it without Sin. The second is a State, or Condition of Life, in it self neither agreeable, nor opposite to the Will of God, yet useful and profitable to Salvation, as affording means of avoiding or overcoming divers Temptations, and facilitating our observance of those Duties which God has expressly enjoyn'd.

If we refer them to the first Object, as the Doctors of the Church of *Rome* really do, there's a manifest Contradiction in this Hypothesis. It being most certain, that theres no degree, no part of Goodness and Holiness, which is not necessary by the Necessity of Precept, or which we can safely and innocently decline.

Even Perfection it self, that Perfection I mean, which is not to be possess'd but in a heavenly State, is yet necessary in this Sense. According to that Command of our Blessed Saviour: *Be ye therefore Perfect, as your Father which is in Heaven is Perfect*; as also according to St. Paul's Discourse to the *Philippians*: *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things which ye have both learned and received, and heard and seen in me, do, and the God of Peace shall be with you.*

If that Perfection, at which no Man ever arriv'd upon Earth, be, in this Sense, necessary,

cessary, much more that which is attainable by the ordinary Succours of Grace, and which many Persons do actually attain? How can we be dispens'd with, for not aspiring after this, nay for actually abandoning and renouncing it? Who is there that does not discern a manifest default, an insupportable Irregularity in such a Procedure?

To act after this manner, is it not to Sin against our selves? For is it not true, that our real Interest obliges us to neglect nothing that may render us more accomplish'd and excellent? And is it not true, at the same time, that nothing can render us so excellent and accomplish'd as Holiness? 'Tis therefore no less than deceiving and betraying our selves, deserting our best Interest, and transgressing the Laws and Maxims of Self-love, to see and know a degree of Sanctity which we might acquire, and yet which we voluntarily pass by.

For, indeed, we have either some Reason for such a Neglect, or we have not. If we have not, we are highly culpable: nothing being more contrary to Reason, than to do any thing without Reason. If we have any Reason, it is certainly a bad one; for it must, of necessity, be taken from some temporal Interest, since our Spiritual Welfare cannot but excite us to make all possible advances in Piety. But would it not be a miserable Blindness, or rather a wicked Profaneness, to pay more regard to a Temporal Interest of what kind soever, than to Piety, in any part, in any possible Degree?

Besides,



Besides, the more we go on and excel in Goodness, the more we confirm and ensure our own Salvation, the farther we are remov'd from the danger of Eternally Miscarrying. And does not Interest oblige us, to do all that lies in our power to save our selves; nay to prevent the losing our selves, and being cast away?

Have we a strong Desire, and hearty Wish, to succeed in any Design ; and do we not undertake an hundred things which are really of no use, in order to it, provided we do not know them to be thus useless? How then can we be allow'd to forbear that, which as it is greatly advantageous, so its advantage and consequence is fully known and apprehended by us ?

This way of proceeding would, therefore, be a breach of our Duty towards our selves; but what is much more, it would be a Sin against God : for we are bound to do all that possibly we can to please him ; and if being assur'd that such an Action is agreeable to him, we yet neglect to perform it, hereby we declare, that our love towards him is but weak and cold, which cannot but be highly criminal in Persons whom so many Considerations engage to love God with their whole Hearts.

Nothing is more essential to Love, than the Desire and Endeavour of pleasing, to our utmost Ability, the Party beloved. To know that by such a performance we shall gain a greater degree of Affection in return, and yet to omit it, is to shew that our own Affection cannot be considerable. And by consequence to act thus with regard to the

Love

Love of God, is to demonstrate that the Love we entertain for him is but faint and languid, and therefore very different from that which both the Law and the Gospel command.

We may apply to the same Argument what I but now observed, concerning the Reasons which hinder us from doing an Action, which we know to be conformable to the Divine Will. These Reasons are ever drawn from some Temporal Interest; but if such an Interest be sufficient to withhold us, do we not visibly prefer it to the desire of pleasing God, and of doing that which is acceptable to him? And to prefer such an Interest to the desire of pleasing God, can this be to love God sovereignly and above all things, as we must of necessity do, if we would avoid the imputation of Sin?

In this respect therefore, whatsoever is Holy, Just, and Well-pleasing to God, is also necessary to us; and that which instructs us in it, ought to be considered not as a Counsel, but as an absolute and peremptory Command, the violation of which is properly sinful.

As to the second Notion which we may form of these pretended Counsels, I acknowledge there may be some States and Conditions more commodious than others; I acknowledge there are some which give a greater facility of performing certain Duties, and afford a better shelter against certain Temptations: such is the state of Celibacy, according to *St. Paul*; but then, there are four things, which we may with assurance, pronounce on this Subject. First,

First, There's a great deal of difference between saying that such a particular State is more convenient in some Respects, and saying that 'tis in it self more holy, and more agreeable to the Divine Will, than another with which it is compared; *St. Paul* may have declared the former, but 'tis certain he has not affirm'd the latter.

In the second place, I say, there's no State which in giving us a facility of performing certain Duties, and in sheltering us from certain Temptations, does not at the same time expose us to some other Temptations, and render the observance of some other Duties much more difficult.

I say, in the third place, we may possibly find our selves under such Dispositions, and in such Circumstances, as that the advantages of this State shall visibly exceed whatever may be incommodious or dangerous in it, as on the contrary we may find our selves under such Dispositions, and in such Circumstances, as that the same State shall expose us to more Dangers than it can balance by its Advantages.

Lastly, I say, when we find our selves in the former of these Cases, we are obliged to prefer this advantageous State, and cannot decline it without Sin; because we may be said properly to Sin, as often as we omit any thing in our power which might conduce to the Honour of God, and to our own Salvation.

For Example, suppose a Man to know that by continuing in Celibacy, he shall be able more to advance the Glory of God and  
his



his own Salvation, and to labour more effectually towards both than he could in a married Life, I am of Opinion that such a Man Sins if he Marries, as not doing all that which the Zeal he ought to have for the Glory of God, and the Care he ought to take of his own Salvation required at his Hands.

Thus, altho' Celibacy consider'd in it self be no way necessary, it may yet become so, upon some occasions; and by reason of the impossibility which we may be under of performing in a married State, some things to which we are indispensably oblig'd.

All this depends upon a Truth, which I believe will not be contested. It is, that whenever an Action indifferent in its kind proves necessary to the doing of what God has commanded, or to the avoiding of what he has forbidden, this indifferent Action changes its Nature, and becomes Good to such a degree, that the omission of it is Criminal. For Instance, To speak is an Action indifferent in its kind, and consequently Silence is in its self lawful and innocent; yet there are some Occasions on which it may cease to be so, and may be rendered culpable and vitious; as at a juncture when something which God has commanded cannot be done without speaking, and yet the observance of this Command cannot be deferred. I have an opportunity of instructing an ignorant Person, of censuring one that is Irregular, of comforting one in Affliction, which I am bound not to pass by. I can do neither of  
C these

these three things without speaking; I cannot therefore be silent without sinning, not because Silence is Evil, or Sinful in its kind, nor because speaking is in it self Good, and agreeable to the Divine Pleasure; but only because the latter now offers it self to me as the Means of performing that which God has enjoined.

I might produce endless Examples of the like Nature, but shall not dwell upon them, it being too easie a Task for any Man to frame them to himself. I shall only say, 'tis the same in the Case of Celibacy, which is, no doubt, of it self indifferent, because otherwise Marriage would be in it self a Sin, as it certainly is not. But how indifferent soever it is in its kind, it may prove more serviceable than Marriage to the advancement of God's Glory and of our own Salvation, which depends upon our present Circumstances and Condition. If we believe it to be thus serviceable, it then commences necessary, and we cannot enter upon a Conjugal State without a breach of Duty. The Reason is, because the Glory of God, and the Salvation of our Souls, engage us to contribute our utmost towards the promotion of them both, and not to contribute our utmost is directly Sinful. So that this Case has no Affinity with the *Counsels* which some Men speak of, and the observance of which, they tell us, is Commendable, and yet the omission of them Innocent.

I shall conclude with this Dilemma, which perhaps will not easily admit of a Reply. Either the observance of these supposed  
Counsels



Counsels is an effect of the Love of God, or it proceeds from some other Cause. If it proceed from any thing besides, 'tis impossible the Action should be good, since 'tis the very Essence of a good Action to have the Love of God for its Motive and Principle. If it be the Effect of the Love of God, then 'tis an Action commanded, and absolutely necessary. For, as the highest Efforts of this Love are of strict and indispensable Obligation, so must every thing be which the same Love engages us to perform.

Upon the whole then, there are no *Counsels* of that Order and Nature, which the Church of *Rome* so much extolls, and that Will of God which is the grand Rule of our Duty, has no other Acts but those three, which I before reckoned up, of Commands, Prohibitions and Permissions. Nothing remains but that we endeavour to learn, by what ways we may come to the Knowledge of this Will; the Consideration of which is the Subject of two following Chapters.

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## C H A P. VI.

*Whether the Light of Nature can instruct us in the Will of God?*

There are two General Ways whereby we may attain to the Knowledge of the Divine Will, Natural Light, and Revelation.



I do not here examine what this Natural Light precisely is; I am little concern'd whether it ought to be plac'd in certain Ideas, connate with us, and stamp'd by God upon our Soul at its first Production; or in such Marks and Traces, as some particular Impressions leave upon the Brain, or in a bare temper of Mind disposing us to be struck with the Evidence of external Objects; presenting themselves to us. These Questions do by no means belong to our present Consideration, nor have any thing in them which ought to stop us in our way. 'Tis enough if we understand, that this Light, whatsoever it be, affords us some knowledge of the Will of God: and so far there is no manner of difficulty.

Indeed St. Paul affirms one thing to be discoverable by this Light, which seems much inferior, in point of Evidence, to many others of its Informations. It is the difference of that Care and Management allow'd to the two Sexes in respect of their Hair.

1 Cor. xi. 24, 15. *Does not even Nature it self teach you, (says he to the Corinthians) that if a Man have long Hair it is a Shame unto him? But if a Woman have long Hair, it is a Glory to her.*

Rom. i. 19. *But the same Apostle expresses himself with more fulness and strength, in respect of the knowledge of God. He says, That which may be known of God is manifest to the Gentiles, for God has shewn it unto them. He says, The Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by Nature the things contained in the Law, and having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves; because They shew the Work of the Law written*

Rom. ii. 14, 15.

*written in their Hearts, their Conscience also bearing witness, and their Thoughts the mean time accusing or else excusing one another.*

We suppose this Light to have shone most pure and lively in the first Man, during his State of Innocence, and to have disclosed to him a multitude of things which escape the Knowledge of his Posterity. But 'tis no less difficult than unnecessary to apprehend what degrees it then bore, and to what compass it extended its Lustre. 'Twill be of much greater Importance to us, to know, what Discoveries it is still able to make in this Condition to which Sin, and the Effects of Sin have reduced Mankind. And this ought to be the Subject of our present Enquiry and Explication.

We may, in the first place, be assur'd, that under our corrupted State, this Light is still sufficient to render us wholly inexcusable in sinning, whether it lets us see the Evil of the Sin which we commit, or conceals it from our View. This is, at least, its Effect, when it might have inform'd us, had we taken care faithfully to consult it, and diligently to follow its Directions. St. Paul teaches thus much in the former of the two Passages but now cited; for having observ'd that *that the invisible things of God, even his Eternal Power and Godhead, are clearly seen*, or are visible, as it were, to the Eye; he subjoins this Inference: *So that they are without excuse.*

It is certain, in the second place, that this Light suffers us to remain ignorant of a multitude of things which we are yet oblig'd to



know; on which account the Scripture so often speaks of the Darkneſs, the Errors, the Ignorance that are in us; acquainting us at the ſame time, that God has provided us a Remedy for them all, by vouchſaſing us the double Light of his Grace, the one external in his Word, the other internal by his Spirit.

But to explain all this a little farther, 'tis neceſſary we obſerve, that there are two ways of uſing and applying theſe feeble reliques of Natural Light. Firſt to conſult this Light only, and to content our ſelves with the Truths it diſplays to us, together with the Conſequences deducible from them. Secondly, by the help of this Light to reaſon upon thoſe Truths which we do not owe to its Diſcovery, but to the Benefit of Revelation.

The former Uſe is reſtrained to very narrow Bounds. We may, I confeſs, by this means arrive at the Knowledge of ſome few Duties; we may perceive ſome part of that which is more eſpecially Criminal in the oppoſite Irregularities. But then we ſhall continue Strangers to the rectitude of many Duties, and to the obliquity of many Sins: Rom. vii. according to that of St. Paul, *I had not known*  
7. *Luſt, except the Law had ſaid, thou ſhalt not*  
*Cover.*

Natural Light will, perhaps, induce us to think, that God without Injuſtice might preſcribe to us certain Laws; but it will by no means convince us, either that theſe Laws were neceſſary to be given, or that he has actually given them, or that ſuppoſing them



them to have been given by him, it should be impossible for him to excuse us from the necessity of observing them.

It may satisfy us that certain Excesses are highly criminal in some particular Cases; but it will not be able to discern, that the same Excesses are blameable in other Cases, no less compris'd under the Prohibition of the Legislator.

Hence it has come to pass, that such as have been guided by no other Light have fallen into so gross and dangerous Mistakes, as appears by the Example of the wisest and most learned among the Heathens, who have left behind them a thousand Extravagancies and Absurdities. Hence the Scripture represents them as Men who were indeed Blind, and whose whole Life was but a continual wandering in the Dark. Thus St. Paul expresses himself to the Ephesians: *This I say therefore and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not, as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their Mind. Having the Understanding darkened, being alienated from the Life of God, thro' the Ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their Heart. Who being past feeling, have given themselves over unto Lasciviousness, to work all Uncleaness with greediness.* *Eph. iv. 17, 18, 19.*

Nor is this all, but we have still somewhat to observe, which is more wonderful and surprizing. There are a great many Divine Laws inseparably connected to that which we Style the Law of Nature, and therefore belonging to the Order of those the Equity of which ought to appear by Na-

tural Light; while yet *Christians*; I might say, the most enlighten'd and most knowing *Christians* are not able to penetrate and comprehend their true Reasons. I might justify my Assertion by many Examples, but Difficulties would arise on this Subject which could not be removed without a long and particular Discourse.

The first use of Natural Light is, therefore, very streight and confin'd, but the second is far otherwise. Revelation supplies us with a very considerable Fund of Principles, from which the Light of Nature may draw indubitable Consequences, provided in drawing them it follows the Rules which it self has establish'd, and the necessity of which it finds by its own Observations. The manner how this is perform'd we shall see in the next Chapter.

Tho' I have advanc'd nothing here but what a thousand Authors have said before me, yet some Exceptions have been taken, to which it may not be inconvenient to reply. But first it seems necessary to explain my self a little farther than I have hitherto done.

I declare first of all, that by Natural Light I understand that Faculty, Power or Aptitude, which God have given to all Men, of discerning Truth from Falshood, and Good from Evil.

That all Persons exercise such a discernment, each after his manner, is what I take for granted, and what I see no necessity of proving. Experience is a full and sufficient Attestation of this: there being no Person  
so



so grossly ignorant or stupid, as not to distinguish, in his own way, many Truths from many Falshoods, many things which are Good, either Naturally or Morally, from many things that are Evil.

Take a Man of the most unlikely Capacity, and ask him whether he does not apprehend some difference between these two Propositions, *One and One are Two*; *One and One are not Two*, he'll answer without demur, that the first Proposition is true, and the second false. And he'll pass the very same Judgment on these Contradictions, *A Son ought to Honour his Father*: *A Son ought to Dishonour and Despise his Father*.

All Men, therefore, all, at least, in whom Nature is not extinct, are able after some sort, and in some degree, to distinguish between True and False, Good and Evil. They must by consequence have some Means, some Instrument, of thus distinguishing. And this is what, after a multitude of Authors of all Sects, I style *Natural Light*.

I call it a *Light*, and at the same time I confess that this Term being Metaphorical, has some little Inconvenience. But, besides that, I can find none more proper, it seems clear and intelligible enough, not only as being very familiar; but likewise because every one perceives the reason of the Metaphor. For Apprehension is to the Soul what Seeing is to the Body. As therefore we have need of Light, strictly so called, to behold a visible Object, so to apprehend an intelligible Truth we have need of somewhat that may disclose and exhibit it to the Mind,

I say



I say this Light is *Natural*, first to distinguish it from Revelation, both external and internal, or which amounts to the same from the Word of God, and the Graces of his Spirit, both which we consider as Supernatural. Secondly, because we are wont to apply the Style and Character of Natural to that which we observe in all Mankind: whereas the Gifts of Grace are peculiar to some Persons only. Lastly, because this Light, this Power of discerning between Truth and Falshood, Good and Evil, is a Perfection due, in some sort, to Humanity. Not that I suppose it possible for God to be a Debtor to Man; I am far from such a Thought, and I would only say, that if Man wanted this Perfection he would not have all that are included in the Idea of a reasonable Animal, that Idea which all the World have agreed to form of his Nature. For how could he deserve the Title and Quality of Rational, if he were unable to distinguish Truth from Falshood, or Good from Evil, upon every occasion?

I say this Light is given us by God; and yet I design not to overthrow what I just now advanc'd in maintaining it to be Natural. For, indeed, if nothing were Natural to Man but what he has of himself, and without the Divine Bounty, Sin alone would be natural to him; because that alone is of his own production and growth. All besides, that he has, or is, proceeds from God; his Body, his Soul, his Understanding, his Will, &c. What hast thou, O Man, that thou didst not receive?

This

This is what I apprehend under the Name of Natural Light; the Existence of which, as I never heard disputed by any, so I have not amus'd my self with its Proof. I have only intimated, that there is some Controversy about its Nature; some making it to consist in certain innate Ideas, others in a certain disposition of Spirit, which determines us to be struck with the Evidence of External Objects; and a third Party in the Evidence it self which thus strikes upon the Mind. This being a very abstracted Point, and belonging much rather to Metaphysics than to Morality, I thought I need not stay to discuss it. I confess, I think so still, and therefore shall only add, that they who desire a thorough View of this whole Question, will find enough to exercise their Curiosity in the Writings which Monsieur *Arnaud*, and Father *Malbranch* have publish'd on the Subject, as also in those of the excellent *English* Philosopher Mr. *Lock*.

Waving, therefore these Debates, which I thought very foreign to the Subject I was upon, I went no farther than to observe, that this Light does not only assist us in the discovery of Natural things, but does in some sort also inform us of the Will of God. I might perhaps have declin'd all trouble of proving it, having never found it contested by any Author: However, I was willing to offer a Reason or two, but only *en passant*, and without prosecuting them at large.

The principal Reason, which I urg'd, was taken from those two places of the Epistle to the *Romans*, where St. *Paul* assures us, that  
what



what may be known of God is manifest to the Gentiles; and that the Gentiles which have not the Law, do by Nature the things contained in the Law, &c. The Author of the *Hambourg Journal* is so far from allowing this to be a good Proof, that, in his Opinion, *St. Paul* affirms the direct contrary to what I pretend. For (says he) if God manifested to the Gentiles that which may be known concerning him, the Light which render'd them Partakers of this Knowledge, properly came from without, i.e. from God who reveal'd and manifested it to them, and who is the Great Source and Fountain of this Light. But if there was a necessity of its coming from without, 'tis impertinent to search for it within, till it shall have been convey'd hither by its genuine Source. And after it has been thus received from abroad, 'tis improper to consider it as Natural to Man, or as that which is Born with him, and the Principles of which he brings into the World, at his first entrance.

But 'tis easie to rejoyn, agreeably to the Observation which I have already made, That if *M. D.* will limit and appropriate the title of Natural, to that which flows in such a manner from the Essence of any particular Subject, as not to stand in need of the Action of God for its Production; the Light he speaks of will not indeed, be thus Natural. But if he takes the Word in the Sense which I have intimated, he cannot deny but that it will very well agree to this Light, and, consequently, my Argument stand good.

Let



Let us hear his Comment on the other Passage. *What St. Paul says in the next Chapter, That the Gentiles which have not the Law, do by Nature the things contained in the Law, doubtless ought to be understood as presupposing the Principle which he had before establish'd, that God had manifested to them what might be known of himself. This was not indeed by the ministry of the Mosaical Law. But God is not so restrained to discover himself to Men only by the Ministry of that Law, but that he has infinite other Means to render them capable of his Light. Such a Portion of it he imparted to the Gentiles, as might enable them to know what was to be known concerning him. Wherefore they might naturally, and without the assistance of the Law, do the things contained in the Law, because God had written the work of the Law in their Hearts, by thus manifesting to them the knowledge of himself. So that there seems to be in this whole Reasoning of St. Paul, nothing whence we can conclude, that there is in Man a Natural Light which instructs him in all, or in part of the Will of God.*

It appears from this Reflection of *M. D.* that we are agreed as to the thing, and dispute only about Words. He acknowledges, that there is a Light, distinct from the Law of *Moses*, which is set up by God in the Hearts of all Men, and which discovers to them some part of the Divine Will. But he cannot but accuse me for calling this Light Natural. If the Term offended him, he would have done well to have suggested another more agreeable to his own Humour. Had he done this, I would have endeavoured to comply

comply with it, being an Enemy to all Disputes, especially upon Verbal Subjects. Since he has not done it, I hope he will not be displeas'd if I continue to use the same which Custom has appropriated, and, as it were, consecrated to this Occasion; especially having freed it from all manner of ambiguity.

My real Thoughts on the matter were these. I intended to say, that a Supernatural Revelation, such as God has reach'd out to Men, in the Law and in the Gospel, is not so absolutely necessary to the attainment of the Knowledge of God, and of our Duty, but that Persons to whom this Revelation has not been extended, the *Chinese* for Instance, or *Japonese*, may yet in some degree, arrive at such a Knowledge. My meaning is, that there are certain Duties of which Barbarians themselves have a Sense, without the Light of the Scriptures, or the Benefit of Preaching. Or, that, in defect of this Supernatural Light, peculiar to those whom it has pleas'd God to favour with it, they have another more common and general, they have a Law which is graven in their Hearts by the Hand of God, and which discovers to them a multitude of things which they ought to perform, and a multitude of others which they ought to forbear. This is all that I design'd to affirm; and this is what *M. D.* has not denied. We concur, therefore, in the principal Point before us.

I produc'd another Passage of Scripture, which does not tend so much to prove, that this natural Light informs us of the Divine Will,



Will, as to intimate that 'tis of greater extent, and more general Service than we may imagine. For since we find *St. Paul* observing that it notifies to us so remote and obscure a Duty, as the different Care which the two Sexes ought to take of their Hair, we may conclude it will not suffer us to be ignorant of other Truths which seem more evident and remarkable.

*M. D.* is not satisfied with this Interpretation of *St. Paul*. He says, the Apostle, by the Word *Nature* in that Text, does by no means understand Natural Light, but only what we term Custom or Mode.

To which I answer, in the first place, that whatsoever *M. D.* may urge, I find it very difficult to persuade my self, that a Person so Grave and Serious as *St. Paul*, and, what is infinitely more, a Person inspir'd, and immediately guided by the Holy Ghost, should argue from a Principle so slight and infirm, not to say so humourfom and extravagant as *the Mode*. Nor am I inclin'd to believe, that *M. D.* who has done so great an Honour to this Law of Custom as to suppose that the Apostle grounded an Argument upon it, does himself approve of the Excess which it authorises, and which the Ministers of Religion so vigorously oppose and condemn.

Secondly *St. Paul* is so far from justifying the Conduct of those who proceed by this vain and capricious Law, that on the contrary he positively forbids the *Romans* to conform to it: *Be ye not conformed to this World.* *Rom. xi. 2.*

Thirdly,



Thirdly, in order to the convincing us that by *Nature*, in this place, *St. Paul* understood no more than the Custom, or Fashion, 'twould be necessary at least, to produce some other Text of Scripture, where the Term was used in the same Sense. For indeed, 'tis very improbable, that *St. Paul* should now affix a different meaning to the Word, from what himself, together with all the sacred Writers, had ever given it. Since, therefore, *M. D.* has not alledg'd any such Example from Scripture, to justify the Sense which he maintains, we have good reason to think, that such a Sense is not intended in this place.

Fourthly, the Word *Teach*, which *St. Paul* here uses, to express the Action of *Nature*, may be applied with far more Justice and Propriety to that Light which enlightens every Man, than to the Mode or Fashion; we never say that the latter *teaches*, as we say very commonly of the former.

I believe then, it may be most convenient to take the Word in the Sense that it ordinarily bears, and by it to understand those common Notions which enable Men to discern between Good and Evil. And we shall be satisfied of this, if we consider two things,

The first is, That as *Salmasius* has proved with great strength, in his Treatise *De Coma*, the original Word made use of by the Apostle, does not barely signify the having or wearing Hair, but the nourishing it with too much delicacy; in short, the doing that which we see practis'd by the generality of Women,

Women, and by some Men; that is, the imploying a considerable part of Life in this Amusement, and the taking a great deal of pains, to render it vainly pleasant and agreeable.

The second is, that if this Care does any way merit Excuse and Favour, it may be more easily tolerated in Women than in Men. Every one knows, that in conferring the proper Endowments on each Sex, God has assign'd Beauty and Agreeableness to the one, and Force and Vigour (of Mind and Body) to the other. As therefore, 'tis but natural to cultivate the Advantages we have received from the Hands of God, provided we exceed not the bounds of Reason and Piety, we may easily apprehend that Women are permitted to be more Nice in the Management of those things which may make them please, and that would seem very indecent and irregular, for Men to imitate them in this regard, and to spend as many Hours at their Toilette. To act in such a manner, would be, no doubt, to debase and degrade our selves, and to shew that we don't understand the Obligations of our superiour Condition.

Whence I conclude, that Natural Light, which is nothing else but good Sense, or right Reason, teaches us, that Men are not allow'd to be so curious about their Hair as Women, or that somewhat is in this respect indulg'd to the latter, which is by no means permitted to the former. And this is so evident a Truth, that the Heathens never doubted of it, as appears from the Verse.



*Sint procul a vobis juvenes ut fœmina compti.*

This Sense, therefore, being so true and just in it self, and likewise so conformable to St. Paul's Expression, and to the whole Course of his Argument, I thought I might be allowed to follow it, as a great number of Interpreters have thought before me. I am still, I confess, of the same Sentiments, and don't see any reason to change them upon the force of this Author's Objections.

He asks me, *Whether a Man who constantly combs and curls, and powders, and performs with the nicest exactness all that we usually Style the nourishing of the Hair, may be said thus to dishonour himself, and to sin against Natural Light? If this be so, (he adds) we have here a Sin against Nature, which most Men commit without the least Scruple.*

In return to this, I have three Considerations to offer: First, That *M. D.* confounds two very different things, to Sin against Natural Light, and to commit a Sin against Nature. To Sin against Natural Light, is to do an Action which Natural Light condemns; or, in a Word, 'tis to transgress the Law which we term Moral, and which is compris'd in the Decalogue. But a Sin against Nature, in the Language of all Mankind, is one of those *Monsters*, as the Fathers are wont to call them, which are so frightful and detestable that they ought not to be named. And therefore, tho' I should pretend that the Case propos'd by *M. D.* is indeed a Sin against Natural Light,



Light, yet I should take care not to push the severity of the Censure to such an extreme as to pronounce it a Sin against Nature.

I answer, in the second place, that the Question which *M. D.* offers is not so far limited by any thing that he says, as that it can be solv'd without some farther restriction. To clear the whole Subject would take up a long Discourse; and since I have prosecuted it at large in my third Volume of Essays, I shall not resume it here. I shall only say in general, the Care which Men take in this respect may be either moderate or immoderate. If it be moderate, there is nothing in it, that Natural Light condemns, nothing contrary to the Sense which I have given of *St. Paul's* Words. But if excessive, and immoderate, I make no scruple to assert, that 'tis contrary to the Light of Nature, and to the Word of God. Nor can I easily believe that *M. D.* is not thus far of my Opinion.

In the third place, I answer, that I find my self dispos'd to pay very little regard to the Authority and Practice of the Multitude, which *M. D.* so much relies upon in the present Argument. If the Practice of the Multitude were a Reason to be alledg'd in matters of Conscience, we should not be allow'd to preach against Luxury in Apparel; against Drunkenness; against the loose and Pagan Education of Children; nor against many other Disorders, which have ever been very common, and perhaps never had a stronger Party, than at this Day. So that when I suppose the Care of which we are speaking to

be in some measure innocent, if moderately exercised, 'tis not that I think we shall often meet with it under this restraint and moderation: 'tis because, while I consider it, in its own Nature, and judge of it by the Rules of God's Word, and of good Sense, I see nothing in it that can be censur'd as criminal.

## C H A P. VII.

*That Revelation fully and perfectly instructs us in the Will of God.*

WE have seen the first way by which we may arrive at the Knowledge of the Divine Will. We have a second, and such as is incomparably more sure and certain than the first, in that Revelation which God has vouchsafed to exhibit to us.

As the Light of Nature has been miserably obscur'd by Sin, and the consequences of Sin, so had it retain'd its Original Purity it could not have instructed us in all things necessary to Salvation. And therefore it has pleas'd God to afford us a better guidance, by the Light of his reveal'd Will: *For after that, in the Wisdom of God, the World by Wisdom knew not God, it pleas'd God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe, says St. Paul.*

1 Cor. i.  
20.

This Revelation has been extended to Men, at sundry times, and in divers manners; but it is now compriz'd in the Books  
of



of the Holy Scripture, which therefore we are bound to search, as the Rule that ought to guide us in the Judgments we pronounce of our Actions.

This Rule is truly perfect and compleat. It is *profitable*, as St. Paul assures us, to render *the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished* 2 Tim. iii. *unto all good Works*, which is the reason that <sup>17.</sup> we are alike forbidden by God to add to it, or diminish from it.

Not that it prescribes, in a direct and formal manner, the whole Scheme of our Behaviour. Many times it is thus express and particular, but not always. Some Duties there are which it enjoins Indirectly, and by Consequence; and this it does in several Methods.

I. Sometimes it refers us to other Rules which it approves and authorizes. Thus by commanding us to obey our Civil and Ecclesiastical Superiors, it indirectly commands whatsoever these Superiors shall enjoyn.

III. It sometimes proposes to us only Principles, leaving us to draw Conclusions for our Practice. This it performs after a double manner; sometimes it expressly lays down both the Principles whence we are to form the Conclusion; sometimes it declares but one of them, because the other is suggested by Natural Light. For an Example of the former, it no where tells us expressly, that we ought to love the Holy Spirit, in a sovereign and transcendent manner, and infinitely above all things. But then, it delivers two Doctrines, from which our Duty in this respect necessarily follows; the one,



that we ought in such manner and degree to love God; the other, that the Holy Ghost is God Blessed for ever, of the same Essence with the Father and the Son; whence we have abundant reason to conclude, that we ought to love him with our whole Heart. For an Instance of the second way: It only tells us, that we ought to impart our Goods to those who are really in want; but it leaves us to examine by the Rules of Prudence, whether such or such a Person who desires our Charity be so real and worthy an Object as we are oblig'd to relieve.

III. Some Cases there are, in which it forbids the Species no otherwise than by condemning the Genius, or Kind, under which such a Species is contain'd. Thus, for Example, there are several Species of Injustice, which the Word of God does not expressly and formally condemn. Avarice and Ambition invent every Day new ones, unheard and unthought of by our Forefathers: But these are all condemn'd by the general Prohibition of Injustice, and by those two great Precepts of giving every one his Due, and of doing to others, as we would they should do to us.

IV. Sometimes, in condemning but one Species, it condemns all others comprehend'd under the same Kind. Thus, the seventh Commandment, while it mentions Adultery only, does yet forbid Incest, Impurity, and all the Sins of that Order.

V. *Analogy* may also have the same Effect, and when two Cases are exactly parallel, the decision of either extends to both. The *Levitical* Law does not expressly forbid a Grand-son

son to marry his Grand-mother ; but since it forbids a Grand-father to marry his Grand-daughter, does not this imply the other Marriage to be likewise Incestuous ? Again, it forbids a Nephew to marry his Aunt by the Fathers side, and a Niece to marry her Uncle by the same side. And is not this enough to let us understand, that both are equally forbidden to marry their Aunt, or Uncle, on the side of their Mother ?

VI. By commanding, or forbidding any external Action, the Word of God commands, or forbids, the internal Action which is the Cause and Principle of the former. Thus, by commanding Alms, it enjoyns Love and Compassion ; by prescribing Prayer to God, it ordains Faith and Confidence in him. On the other hand, our Lord himself has taught us in his Gospel, that the Prohibition of Murther and Adultery extends to the Condemnation of rash Anger, and of unchaste Desires.

VII. In prescribing a Duty, it implicitly prescribes all the necessary Means of fulfilling that Duty. Thus, when it commands a Pastor to preach sound Doctrine, it likewise obliges him to know what Doctrine is sound, and to exercise himself in it by careful Study and Meditation. On the contrary, in forbidding a Sin, it forbids every thing that may lead, or invite to the commission of it ; admonishes us to avoid all Occasions and Temptations, every step or tendency that way.

VIII. Lastly, by recommending a Virtue, it condemns the opposite Vice ; and by con-

demning a Vice, it recommends the opposite Virtue.

There is scarce any evil Action which the Scripture does not prohibit, or any good Action which it does not prescribe, after one, or other, of these Manners: Nay, there are few, concerning which it does not expressly and formally declare it self. We are therefore to embrace it, as a most full and perfect Rule, and to acknowledge the reasonableness of our being forbidden to make the least addition to it.

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### C H A P. VIII.

*That the Laws of our Country, and, in general, the Commands of our Civil Superiors, are Rules which oblige the Conscience.*

W<sup>H</sup>at has been said may suffice, as to the first and principal Rule of Conscience. I have intimated that there are other subordinate Rules prescrib'd by, and depending upon this. In which number we are to reckon Civil and Ecclesiastical Laws, together with those Engagements which we enter into by our own Act and Deed, either formally and directly, as in Contracts, Promises, Oaths, &c. or indirectly, and sometimes even against our Will, as it happens in Sins of Injustice, where we are always oblig'd (willing, or unwilling) to repair the Evil we have done.

I choose



I choose to make the Obligation which we are under of obeying Civil Laws, and the Commands of our Governours, to depend on the Will of God, because the other Foundations on which it is wont to be built do not appear of sufficient Strength and Solidity.

In the first place, some have affirm'd the Power of Princes and Magistrates to be an Emanation of Paternal Authority, and the Father to be, by the Law of Nature, Lord over his Children, and his Children's Children. They add, that upon the Fathers decease, this Authority passës to the eldest Son; and they maintain, that the most ancient States in the World had no other Original.

But this Opinion is expos'd to a great number of Difficulties not presently to be surmounted. For first, the Assertors of it would find themselves at some loss to prove, that by the Law of Nature, Fathers have the Power of Life and Death over their Children, especially when arrived at the Years of Maturity. They would still be more distressed to evince, that this Power, whatsoever it be, devolves from the Father on the eldest Son, and that the younger Children are by the Law of Nature oblig'd to pay him the same Submission and Obedience which they before paid the Father. And yet it would be a harder Task than either of these, to demonstrate that this Power extends over Cousins, Nephews, Uncles, and infinite Collateral Branches, as it must necessarily do, if this Hypothesis hold good.

Besides,

Besides, if Princely Power were but an Emanation of Paternal Authority, a Prince would have no more Command over his Subjects than a Father has over his Children. But this cannot be asserted, because in all States and Kingdoms, the Paternal Authority is it self made subject to the Prince, who restrains it within such bounds and limits as he judges convenient.

Lastly, were the whole Assertion true in it self, I don't see how at present it could obtain any use in the World: For however this be, 'tis certain that not one of the Monarchies which we are acquainted with, derives it self from such an Original. I know no Prince that claims, as lineally descended from the most ancient Family in his Kingdom; so that I take this to be but a barren Speculation.

Others there are, who pretend that the Obligation we are now speaking of, arises wholly from that Covenant which we enter'd into when we joyn'd our selves in Civil Union and Society. They tell us, that every Man being naturally Master of his own Actions, each renounced this Right by submitting to a Common Superior, who by Agreement, was invested with the Power of making Laws, and punishing Transgressors. Inſomuch, that this Covenant having once pass'd, no Man can dispense with his own Obedience, without violating one of the Fundamental Laws of Nature, which commands us to stand to our Engagements.

But

But without examining at present, whether Societies were really form'd after this manner, I shall only assert, that the Consent here alledg'd is not a sufficient Foundation to support the necessity of Obedience; which that we may distinctly apprehend, we need only consider, that Laws are unarm'd, and impotent things, unless guarded by penal Sanctions; nor is it enough for them to denounce external Evils, such as Loss of Goods, Imprisonment or Exile; were there no other Punishments to be fear'd, they would be in danger of very frequent Violations. It is necessary, therefore, to inforce them by the addition of Corporal Severities, of Death especially. And this is no more than what all Legislators have thought themselves impower'd to do: there is not one of them but has condemn'd to capital Punishment such as shall transgress, if not the smaller, yet however the more weighty and important of their Constitutions.

Now I would ask, upon what this Power was grounded, which Lawgivers have thought fit to assume to themselves? Was it upon the consent of the People? But had the People a Right of consenting in this Matter? Were they Masters and Arbitrators of their own Lives? Does it not seem evident on the contrary, that our Life is not at our own disposal, nor are we the just Proprietors of it? For if we were, we might part with it at Pleasure, as we may with our Goods and Estates; but since none pretends to this Liberty, and in as much as Self-murther is no less a Sin than the Murder  
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of others, or rather the first is vastly more heinous than the second, it appears, that our Lives are by no means in our own power, and therefore we cannot offer them as a Forfeit, or make the loss of them a Condition in any Covenant. So that if the Power of Legislators were grounded wholly upon such an Agreement, they could proceed no farther in punishing the breach of their Laws, than to Banishment, Prison, or Pecuniary Amercement, but could not touch the Life of the Offender.

We are therefore to go much higher in search of their Commission, and are to conclude, that this Power was given them by the Author of Life, by the Supreme Lord of all; This the Holy Scripture amply testifies.

Rom. xiii. 1. It declares, that *there is no Power but of God, and that the Powers which be are ordained of God.* It affirms, that the Prince is the Minister of God, a Revenger to execute Wrath upon him that doth Evil.

Hence again arises our Obligation to obey our Sovereigns, and to comply with their Injunctions: *Let every Soul*, says St. Paul, *be subject to the higher Powers.* But he goes farther, and assures us in express Terms, that 'tis Conscience which engages us to be thus Subject: *Ye must needs be subject*, says he, *not only for Wrath* (that is, upon the apprehension of Punishment) *but also for Conscience sake.*

1 Pet. ii. 13. St. Peter likewise Exhorts us in the same manner: *Submit your selves to every Ordinance of Man, for the Lord's sake, whether unto the King as Supreme, or unto Governours, as those who are sent by him.* The Expression, *for the Lord's*

*Lord's sake*, is very remarkable: It lets us see, that our Duty towards God engages us also to submit to our Sovereigns; because, indeed, since God has commanded us to obey them, every Contempt of their Orders is an Act of Disobedience to God himself.

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## C H A P. IX.

*Whether we ought to yield Obedience to all the Laws of Civil Governors?*

**T**HIS, if I mistake not, is the true Foundation and Principle of that Obligation which we lie under to obey our Civil Superiors; but then, what is the extent of this Obligation? Are we bound to observe all the Orders imposed by such our Lawful Sovereigns? For my part, I doubt not to answer in the Affirmative; and indeed the Texts which I have produc'd in the Chapter preceding, command us universally, and without interposing any Exception, to be subject to the Higher Powers.

Yet one Exception there is, which in those places must be understood, because in others 'tis clearly and formally express'd; and this is, that we are bound to obey, unless the Civil Laws, or the Commands of the Prince, or of inferiour Magistrates, enjoin us to do that which is contrary to the Will of God. For if so, we are then, no doubt, oblig'd to disobey, agreeably to that Maxim of the Apostles, who when forbidden to preach, by  
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the Jewish Council, replied with Holy Courage and Confidence, *Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you, more than unto God, judge ye.*

'Tis necessary, therefore, that a Law be *Just*, to give it a Power of obliging him to whom it is directed: For if it be unjust, 'tis certain that it can produce no Obligation; but this Truth must be rightly apprehended. My meaning therefore is, not that every Law ought to be *positively* Just; that is, to prescribe things which are just in themselves, and in their own Nature: For if so, all Laws about indifferent things might be innocently violated; to assert which, is absurd and intolerable: It being notorious, That things in their own Nature indifferent, are the most general Subjects of Civil Constitutions. I mean no more than that they ought to be *Negatively* Just, (as we say) that is, they ought to enjoyn nothing which is positively unjust.

This is not all; we must have regard to another Consideration. There are some Laws unjust in a certain Sense, and yet of the Number and Order of those which necessarily engage our Obedience. An excellent Author has explained this Point by observing, That things may be unjust two ways; some are unjust to do, as Lying, Perjury and Blasphemy; others are only unjust to suffer, as Imprisonment for the Profession of the Truth. 'Tis injustice to commit a Man to Prison for adhering to the true Religion: But this Injustice exists only in the Person committing, and by no means in the Person committed.



ted. We are bound then, to obey the Laws of the second kind, but not those of the first, or, in a Word, we are bound to obey, tho' by our Obedience we suffer Injustice, provided we *do* none.

So that we are permitted to refuse Obedience to those Laws only which command things actively unjust, or unjust to be done; and even here we ought to be very well assur'd of their Injustice. A bare Suspicion is by no means enough in this Case; we ought to have nothing less than a Certainty, which 'tis necessary to observe, for the decision of a very important Question. It is ask'd, What we are to do, when we doubt of the Justice of any Command to which our Obedience is required? We know not whether the Command be lawful or unlawful; we have used our best Endeavours to obtain Satisfaction, but without success: For Example, May a Soldier who knows not, nor can know, whether the War be just, or unjust, act in it with Innocence?

All the Casuists which I have perused, the Reformed particularly, answer without scruple, that Obedience is necessary on these Occasions; and they all give this Reason, That in dubious Cases we ought to take the safer Side. But now 'tis safer here, to obey than disobey; because Obedience is the express Command of God. Were the thing otherwise, it would be very difficult to find any of the Soldiery who could innocently follow their Profession; since there are so few who know the true Reasons on which their Prince commences a War, or, who,  
if

if they did know them, are able to judge as to the Equity and Legality of them.

## CHAP. X.

### *Of Ecclesiastical Ordinances.*

**T**HE Holy Scripture commands us, not only to yield Obedience to Civil Laws; and to the other Injunctions of our Sovereigns, but likewise to submit our selves to the Rules establish'd by the Guides and Directors of the Church. Thus St. Paul exhorts the  
*Heb. xiii. 17. Hebrews: Obey them that Guide you, and submit your selves; for they watch for your Souls, as they that must account; that they may do it with joy.* And our Lord himself has appointed, in his Gospel, that if any refuse to  
*Mat. xviii. 17. hear the Church,* such an one should be to us, *as an Heathen Man and a Publican.*

From all which, we see plainly, that 'tis the Duty of private Christians to obey their Spiritual Guides; but then 'tis ask'd, whether this Obligation be such as we cannot prove defaultant in without Sin, or which amounts to the same, whether the Ordinances of the Church oblige the Conscience?

To illustrate, in some measure, this Subject, which we must own to be somewhat obscure, let us consider, that the Church may prescribe to us three kinds of Duties. The first are those which God expressly and formally requires in his Word: and here the Church does only propose and inculcate to  
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us, what is commanded by God; she performs not the part of a Law-giver; but only of a Herald, or Proclaimer.

The second kind are those, which God does Command, but not directly, and in express Terms. It is necessary to deduce them by a long train of Reasonings, from such Principles as the Word of God supplies us with; and in this respect the Church performs the Office, not of a Law-giver, but of a Teacher.

The last are those, which consists of Actions indifferent in their own Nature, and in which God has left us to our Liberty, without giving us any particular Command concerning them; yet such as the Church has found reason to enjoin, or to prohibit, judging the use of them to be necessary, for the avoiding of Confusion, and the preserving of Decency and Order: Thus, for Instance, 'Tis the common Judgment and Wish, that Holy Offices should be some time celebrated in the Week Days, when the whole Church may assemble tojoyn in their Prayers to God, and in hearing his Word. Now to this End 'tis necessary, that certain Days should be set apart, and certain Hours precisely determined; it not being otherwise possible to avoid Disorder, or to Execute that which all agree to be reasonable. It's indifferent whether the Day be Wednesday, (suppose) or Thursday, and whether the Hour be that of Eight, Nine, or Ten. 'Tis possible there may be no particular reason why any one of these Days, or of these Hours, should be preferred to the rest; and yet such a preference

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ference must needs be fix'd ; and accordingly the Church makes the Decision, appointing a Day, and an Hour, for Divine Service. The Question is, how our Duty stands in these three several Respects, and what's the Necessity of Obedience under each ?

Luke x.  
16.

There can be no Dispute as to Actions of the first and second Order. In both those Cases, to submit our selves to the Church, is to submit our selves to God, whose Will the Church declares and proposes to us. It is here, especially, that the saying of our Lord to his Disciples takes place, *He that heareth you heareth me, and he that despiseth you despiseth me.*

The Question must therefore be restrain'd to the third Order of Duties : But to give a little more Light to this Matter, it may not be improper to observe, That there are Three Degrees of Submission, which we may yield to the Ordinances of the Church.

The First, and weakest of all, is to Proportion our Obedience to those Reasons on which the Church builds her Resolutions ; so that if we find the Reasons to be good and solid, we may be ready to Obey ; but on the contrary, may not scruple to slight the Decrees of the Church, if there was no reason for the making them.

The Second is, to obey the Church without regard to her Reasons ; yet so as to pay this Obedience then only, when to be wanting in it would seem a Contempt of the Church, or would give Scandal to our Neighbours. We may be then said to Contemn or Despise the Church, when we disobey  
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Her without Reason ; nay, without very considerable Reason : And we then disobey with the Scandal of our Neighbours, when we do not conceal our Disobedience ; but on the contrary, publish and declare it without the least Care or Caution.

For Example : The Church sees convenient to appoint a Publick Fast : There are some Persons whose Constitution is such, that to Fast a whole Day would so far incommode them, as that instead of being better disposed for Prayer and Meditation, they would not be in a condition to apply themselves to these Pious Exercises : Others there are who might bear a Day's Fasting, and yet not in the least hinder or discompose their Devotion, which is the Case of most Men.

Let us suppose, that both the one and the other forbear to Fast upon the Day which the Church appoints : The Latter will Disobey with Contempt, because they have no good reason for their Forbearance ; but the Former without Contempt, because they forbear upon Motives of considerable Weight.

Let us suppose again, That the Former, who break the Orders of the Church without any Contempt, and with some appearance of Necessity, shall at the same time Eat in the Presence of their Children, their Servants, or any other Person ; in this Case, they disobey with Scandal and Offence ; because they give occasion to the Beholders to think, that they undervalue the Church's Authority.

The Third Degree of Submission is, to think our selves bound to Obey when neither of these Cases happens, or beyond the dan-



ger of Contempt and Scandal : That is, in a Word, upon all Occasions whatsoever, so as to submit no less in Private than in Publick, no less when we have Reasons to alledge for our Non-compliance, than when we have not.

None will ever deny, but that we owe the Church the first Degree of Submission here describ'd ; and that 'tis the Duty of private Christians to conform to her Resolutions, when founded upon any solid Reasons : But indeed, to submit only thus far to the Authority of the Church, is not to submit to it at all : For are we not bound to comply with those who have no manner of Power or Jurisdiction over us, when they bring good and solid Arguments for what they offer ? Besides, is it not very possible, that the Church may have good Reason to suppress the Motives which induc'd her to any Resolution ? Shall this intercept our Obedience ? Or, lastly, may it not happen, that the Church shall find it greatly important, to describe the Preference between two Subjects, which in themselves are equal, as appears by the Example but now given ? And who imagines that we are excus'd from obeying, in a Case of this Nature ?

Upon all these Considerations, our Divines pronounce the first Degree of Submission to be utterly insufficient, and require that the Second at least be added ; that is, that we obey the Church in all Cases, when our Disobedience would argue a Contempt of her Authority, or would give Scandal to the Weak.

Some



Some few Professors amongst the Reformed, and in general all those of the Church of *Rome*, go much farther, and would have us add the third Degree of Submission to those already mention'd. They affirm, That we ought to obey at all Times, and upon all Occasions ; and that we Sin in not obeying after so absolute a manner.

The strongest Reason alledg'd by the Patrons of this Opinion is, That we must acknowledge such a Degree of Obedience to be due to the Laws of the State, and to all the Orders of our Civil Superiors : Ought we not therefore to pay the like Deference to our Ecclesiastical Superiors, since we are commanded by God to obey these as well as the former ?

But there's a wide Difference between these two Kinds of Superiors : The Former are Masters or Lords, and as such have a Power of absolutely commanding us, which the Latter have not. Our Saviour Himself has made this Distinction ; *The Kings of the Gentiles* (says He to his Disciples) *exercise Lordship over them, and they that exercise Authority upon them are called Benefactors : But ye shall not be so ; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger ; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.* St. Peter addresses himself in the same manner to all the Guides of the Church ; *Feed the Flock of God which is among you, taking the Oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly ; not for filthy Lucre, but of a ready Mind ; neither as being Lords over God's Heritage, but being Examples to the Flock.*

To argue therefore, from one of these Powers to the other, is Inconsequential ; since the Holy Scripture makes a wide Distinction between them in this point : But it will be said, What Authority then can the Church retain ? First, 'tis certain, she must ever have some Authority : And 'tis certain, in the second Place, That this Authority is chiefly exercis'd in the Regulation of Things indifferent : Can we, therefore, acknowledge Her to be vested with such an Authority, while yet we forbear the Performance of what she enjoins ?

I Answer : One of these two Things must always happen in the Case ; either that the Church proceeds according to her Duty, or that she does not : If she does, and if she contains herself within the Bounds prescribed to Her by God, she will not pretend to oblige, except in the danger of Contempt or of Scandal, those to whom her Commands are directed ; and therefore, to act contrary to her Commands, when there's good Reason for so doing, is not to oppose the Intention of the Church, or to disobey her Authority.

If she does not keep herself within these Limits, but designs to oblige her Children after an absolute manner, she exceeds her Commission ; and if we obey her not, this Disobedience terminates in herself alone, and is by no means reflected upon God ; because the Authority which we thus disavow, is wholly usurp'd, and no kind of Emanation from the Divine Power.

This will appear more evident, if we consider, That, according to *St. Paul's Rule*,  
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the Power of the Guides of the Church is a good and beneficial Power, tending to *Edification*, and not to *Destruction*: *This I speak for your own Profit, not that I may cast a Snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without Distraction*, as he delivers himself in another place: But the Church would certainly make a quite different use of her Power; she would exert it in destroying, not in edifying; she would lay Snares for her Children; should she give them Laws which they could not violate without Sin, and without exposing themselves to the Peril of Eternal Ruine. Under this Hypothesis, What would become of her Prudence on the one side, or of her Charity on the other?

I might offer many other Proofs of what I now assert; but I shall content my self with two more, which to me appear demonstrative: The First is, That if the Laws of the Church obliged the *Conscience* in such a manner, as that the Transgression of them were a Sin, the Observance of them would then be a good Action: This Consequence our Adversaries allow; and indeed, there are two Considerations which evince it to be necessary.

1. The Church would shew a very strange Degree of ill Treatment towards her Children, should she impose on them such Laws as could serve only to drive them into Sin, and even precipitate them into Damnation, in case they transgress'd them; and yet could not at all conduce to their Admission into Heaven, in case they observ'd them: Upon this Supposition, Would she not do much more wisely, never to make such Laws? Or



is it ever possible she should have good and sufficient Reason to make them?

2. The Second Consideration enforcing the necessity of the Consequence above-mention'd is, That the Persons against whom I Dispute, pretend the Violation of Ecclesiastical Laws to be therefore only sinful, because it implies an Infraction of the Law of God, who has commanded us to obey the Church: But if not to do what the Church enjoins be to violate the Law of God, must it not be allow'd, That to comply with her Injunctions, is to observe the same Divine Law, and consequently to perform a good and virtuous Act?

It is certain, therefore, That if the Laws of the Church did absolutely bind the *Conscience*, our Acts of Submission to them would be such Works as are morally Good; yet this is what can by no means be affirm'd; and our Lord himself has expressly determin'd the contrary. The Guides of the Jewish Church, the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, required absolutely the use of certain Washings before Meat. They had pass'd a Law to this purpose, and were highly displeas'd to see the Apostles neglect the Observance of it. They complain'd to our Blessed Saviour (as St.

Mark vii. 5: *Mark* informs us) with this Question; *Why walk not thy Disciples according to the Tradition of the Elders?* But our Lord answers them;

Mark vii. 6, 7, 8. *Well hath Esaias prophesied of you Hypocrites, as it is written, This People honoureth me with their Lips, but their Heart is far from me. Howbeit, in vain do they worship me, teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men. For laying aside the*

*the Commandment of God, ye hold the Tradition of Men, as the washing of Pots and Cups, and many other such like things ye do.*

We have here as clear a Decision as possible. The Subject of the Discourse was a Law authoriz'd by Tradition, and receiv'd by the whole Church ; for St. *Mark* expressly tells us, That *the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their Hands oft, eat not.* The 3. Object of this Law was an Action indifferent in its own Nature ; but which being thus enjoin'd by the Church, would have commenced Good and Laudable, had their Church been really possess'd of so large an Authority as they pretended : But we are sure, the Action did not thus become Good ; and our Lord declares positively on the contrary, That the Performance of it was vain and unprofitable, in respect of his Worship and Service ; *In vain do they Worship me, teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men.*

Lastly, If Ecclesiastical Laws obliged the *Conscience*, the Church would only have changed her Yoke by the Establishment of Christianity : She would still continue a Slave ; and the only Difference would be, That whereas under the Law her Servitude was terminated with respect to God, she would now be in Bondage to Men. What mighty Advantage could she obtain by her Disenthralment from the *Mosaical* Ceremonies, were she still subject to the necessity of Obeying others no less Obligatory, and perhaps no less Numerous.

But the Apostles give us no such Idea of the Church. They, through the whole Series

ries of their Writings, represent the Faithful under the Law as Bondmen ; and *Christians* as the Freemen of our Lord and Saviour. A manifest Proof, that our Condition is chang'd in this regard ; and consequently, that what is thus indifferent, no longer binds the *Conscience*.

*M. D.* objects Three things against the Substance of this Chapter. He says, First, That I too much depress the Power of Ecclesiasticks. In the Second place he says, That on the contrary, I too much exalt the Power of Temporal Magistrates. Thirdly, He pretends, That I give a false Exposition of our Saviour's Words, in the Text before cited. It concerns me to justify my self upon these Three Articles.

I. If I am mistaken in the first Point, I have err'd with good Company. I have asserted nothing but what all our Divines have maintain'd before me, *Sanderfon* only excepted. At least, He, of all that I have read, is the only one who chose to follow the *Romish* Church, rather than the Reformed, in this Point ; for we are to know, That ever since the Reformation, it has been a particular Controversy between the *Romanists* and us, Whether Ecclesiastical Laws oblige the *Conscience*, in other Cases besides those of Contempt and Scandal. The Church of *Rome* has declar'd for the Affirmative ; and *Protestant* Authors, as well *Lutherans* as *Calvinists*, for the Negative. If any question this, let them give themselves the trouble of reading *Bellarmino de bonis operibus*, particularly *Lib. II. Chap. VI.* and the *Fratres de Valemboorch*,  
Tom.



Tom I. p. 183. Tom II. p. 187. among the *Papists*; and among those of our Communion, the Supplement to *Chamier*, p. 375. *Rivet's Summary of Controversies*, Tract II. Quest. 9. *Mestrezat of the Church*. *Theses Salmurienses*. Tom I. Disp. 1.

But this is not all, the Confession of Faith, publish'd by the Reform'd Churches of *France*, is express to the same purpose; see Article XXXIII. So that if I have gone too far in this respect, I have all the Protestant Churches for my Vouchers.

II. I have the same Defence to make to the second Charge. *M. D.* objects, that I give too large a Power to Princes and Magistrates. The Power which I give them, is to make such Laws as shall oblige the Conscience. But am I the only Asserter of this Power? Do not all the Reform'd, all Protestants, all Christians, except Quakers and *Socinians*, joyn in the Acknowledgment? Has not *St. Paul* himself deliver'd this Doctrine long before me? Indeed what can we conceive to be more direct and express, than that which he tells the *Romans*: *Te must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for Conscience sake?*

III. Hitherto, therefore, I have kept within Bounds. As to the Exposition which I have given of our Saviour's Words, in this I have only follow'd my Masters, *Calvin* particularly, who in an express and formal manner rejects the Opinion now maintain'd by *M. D.* The Case in short is this; I reply to an Objection of the *Papists*. They say, 'tis absurd to suppose, that the Laws of Civil  
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vil Governours should bind the Conscience, and yet to deny the same binding Power to those of our Spiritual Guides ; since we are commanded by God to obey the latter no less than the former. Now I observe that there's a considerable difference between these Cases ; because Temporal Magistrates are properly our Masters ; whereas the Directors of the Church are only term'd Ministers or Servants. In Proof of this, I alledge those Words of our Saviour ; *The Kings of the Gentiles exercise Lordship over them, and they that exercise Authority upon them are called Benefactors. But ye shall not be so : but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.*

*M. D.* pretends that I have mistaken the Sense of this Text. He affirms that our Lord does not here oppose the Power of Spiritual Guides to that of Temporal Magistrates ; but only the manner in which *Christians* ought to exercise their Authority of what kind soever, whether Sacred or Civil, to the manner in which the Heathen Governours exercise theirs. Now, I have several Remarks to offer, on this Point.

I. That *M. D.* ought not to have been satisfied with barely telling us his Sentiments as to the Text in Dispute. He ought to have proved the Truth of them, which yet he has wholly neglected.

II. I add, that 'twill be no great difficulty to shew that the Mistake is on his side ; for, indeed, it does not appear, that our Lord absolutely condemns the Dominion of which he speaks. There's nothing in the whole



whole Discourse upon which we may ground such a Conjecture. I know *Bellarmino* was of that Judgment, and believed that the Word which we render to *exercise Lordship*, properly signifies, to tyrannize and oppress; but our Divines have given demonstrative Proofs of the contrary. See *Gataker* in his *Cinnus*, l. 1. c. 3. where he produces many Passages of Sacred and Prophane Writers, who use the Word to denote an Authority rightly exercis'd and imploy'd; and indeed the LXX have applied it to the beginning of the CXth Psalm, where *Christ* is said to rule in the midst of his *Enemies*; and to that place in the XCIXth Psalm, where we read, *the Upright shall have Dominion over the wicked.*

III. It seems likewise, in my Judgment, that our Lord is here speaking of a lawful Dominion; for he says, those who exercise it, *are called Benefactors*; but we dont express our selves in this manner of such as use their Authority only to oppress and aggrieve their Subjects: we call them not Benefactors, we call them Tyrants.

IV. Besides, 'tis evident that our Lord in this Discourse assigns the cause of his rejecting the Petition of the two Disciples. But these Disciples did not request of him Power and Permission to oppress their Brethren: They barely desired the chief Authority and Precedence, intending, no doubt, to use it in the best manner, and as a means of advancing the Kingdom of *Jesus Christ*. It was therefore an innocent Authority which their great Master refused them, because 'twas an innocent Authority for which they petition'd.

V. But



V. But let us suppose that our Saviour here speaks of the Abuse which some Princes make of their Authority and Power: nothing can be hence inferr'd to the prejudice of the Power and Authority it self. This must be granted as necessary, because soon after he alledges his own Example: He says, that he *came not to be ministred unto, but to minister*; yet 'tis most certain, he did not hereby design to renounce his own Right and Power of Commanding us.

The Authority of Kings and Princes is, therefore, left secure and unimpair'd by this Discourse of our Lord; and thus far *M. D.* will agree with me; for he has taken care not to fall into the Extravagance of the *Anabaptist* and *Socinians*, who pretend, that our Saviour in these Words has forbidden Christians to exercise any manner of Authority over one another. He will as readily grant, that this Authority consists for the most part, in commanding things indifferent. For as without such a Right 'tis impossible any form of Government should be establish'd or preserved; so if Princes were only allowed to command, or forbid, that which is in it self Good or Evil, they would do no more than apply, and publish the Law of God, which the meanest Subject might as well perform.

Yet this Concession is sufficient for my purpose; for hence it follows, that when Princes shall enjoin indifferent things we are bound to obey them, and cannot otherwise avoid the imputation of Sin. For can our Disobedience to them be consistent with what  
the

the Scripture elsewhere commands? Is it agreeable to *St. Paul's Admonition: Let every Soul be subject to the higher Powers?* Or, to *St. Peter's Exhortation: Submit your selves to every Ordinance of Man for the Lord's sake?* Or to the Injunction of our Lord himself: *Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesars?*

There is nothing, then, in what I have here asserted, that ought to offend *M. D.* And I can see no Exception, indeed, that lies against it, unless any one should affirm, with the Church of *Rome*, that Pastors have the same Authority over their Flock, as Princes over their Subjects; which, I believe, is farther than *M. D.* will go in this matter.

*Remarks on the tenth Chapter.*

**B**ECAUSE the Subject of this Chapter has been treated of with particular disadvantage, by the Reformed Divines of the *Gallican* Confession, as well on account of the unhappy necessity (a) which first establish'd their Discipline, as by reason of their precarious Dependence at home, and their imperfect Coalition with other States and Churches since the Great Persecution; and because the mistaken, or insufficient Authority of these Writers is yet constantly alledg'd amongst us in favour of a Division, so groundless in its Rise, so obstinate in its Continuance, and  
so

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(a) See this Necessity most justly related, and most charitably explain'd, in the excellent Preface of *Mr. Hooker*.



so pernicious in its Effects, that the Learned Author might not suffer through the like Misapplication; the Translator has, in Justice to him, and as a necessary Caution to the Reader, subjoin'd these few Remarks.

*Rights of  
Protestant  
Dissenters,*  
pag. 13.

By the two previous Distinctions, one of the several kinds of Duties; the other of the several Degrees of Submission: The Author has very judiciously open'd the way to his Question; and by asserting the Power of the Church to enjoin indifferent things; has cut off that old and newly reviv'd Plea of Separation from a National Church, *the Imposition of a thing indifferent, not the indifferent thing impos'd*; which Plea being a direct Contradiction, not only to the Doctrine and Practice of all Foreign Protestant Churches, but to the Nature of a Church, and of Society and Government in General, is too weak and rotten to bear the Colours which a late Artist, or any other, can lay upon it. The whole Question concerning the Obligation of Ecclesiastical Ordinances, is happily superseded, whenever the Decrees of the Church are Ratified by the Constitutions of the State: (a) And such a Ratification ought always, if

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(a) As in the Creation there was Light before the Sun, that we might learn, that the Sun was not the Fountain of Light, but God; so there was a Government in the Church, even before the Princes were Christians, that the Support and Ornament of God's Church might be own'd, as an efflux of the Divine Power, and not the kindness of Princes: But yet, as  
when



when the Light was gather'd and put into the Body of the Sun, we afterwards deriv'd our Light from him; and account him the Prince of all the Bodies of Light; so when the Government External of all things was drawn into the Hands of Princes becoming Christians, to them the Church owes the Heat and the Warmth, the Light and the Splendor, the Life of her Laws, and the Being of all her great Advantages of Maintenance and Government *Bishop Taylor, Duct. Dub. Book III. Cap. IV. Rule V.*

if possible; to be procur'd, is the Judgment of the *Protestant Synod of France*, in the *Thesis de Ecclesia*, drawn up by *Lud. Capellus*; *Prefix'd to the Thesis* and confirm'd by General Approbation; in which 'tis declar'd, That the Church, or *Salmurien* Churchmen, have so far only a power of ordaining things indifferent, as the Civil Magistrate; if Christian, shall approve and ratify, and pass into Laws: Agreeably to which we find the King, by his Letters to the Synods, requiring them to remit to him an account of the Canons they had fram'd, that he might order them to be Register'd in his Parliament of *Paris*. If the Church be consider'd (as here it is) distinctly from the State, under this Consideration, it is by all, but *Erastians* and *Libertines*, confessed to have an essential, inherent Power of doing all things necessary to the end of its Institution; so that in case it should be either deserted or oppress'd, by the Temporal Governor, it ought still to execute the Commission it has receiv'd from God, by prescribing first all Matters of Faith, Morals or Worship, contain'd in the Holy Scriptures, or necessarily deducible from them; and Secondly, all such Ceremonies and Circumstances as may tend to Decency,

F Order,

*Prefix'd to the Thesis Salmurien*

*In the Synodicon Gallicanum*

Order, and Edification. (a) Ecclesiastical Injunctions of the former kind must oblige the *Conscience* in all Cases, and at all times, the Matter of them being necessary, and commanded by God Himself. Those of the latter kind being by our Author, and all that own the necessity of Church-Communion, acknowledg'd to bind the *Conscience* in all Cases, when our Disobedience would argue a Contempt of Authority, or would give Scandal to the Weak. The Author's Question ( ' Whether Ecclesiastical Ordinances, ' concerning Things indifferent, bind the ' *Conscience* beyond the danger of Contempt ' or Scandal) seems unnecessary ; because as to these Matters, the Power of binding would in *this* Degree be sufficient to all the Purposes of its Appointment and Designation. As to the unequal Comparison between the Laws of the State, and the Canons of the Church, tho' made by others of great Name besides our Author, it will not strictly hold. *Whatever Advantages the Secular Power may have above the Ecclesiastical, or the Ecclesiastical above the Secular, in other respects ; yet as to the Power of binding, all Humane Laws in general, are of like reason, and stand upon equal Terms ; that is, the Necessity which the one or the other impose, arises not properly from the Authority of the immediate Lawgiver, but from the*  
*Ordi-*

Bishop Sanderson's  
 Sermon on  
 1 Pet. II.  
 16.

(a) Since the Government of Internal Actions, and a Body, or Society of Men, must suppose External Acts, Ministries, Circumstances, and Significations ; no man can from without Govern that which is within, unless he have Power to Govern that without which the Internal Act cannot be done, in Publick in Union and Society. *Idem B. III. C. IV. R. VI.*



Ordinance of God, who has commanded us to obey the Ordinances of Man for his sake. Such Necessity of Obedience notwithstanding, the things remain in the same Indifference as before; every way in respect of their Nature, and quoad rem, it being not in the Power of accidental Relations to change the Nature of Things) and even in respect of their use, and quoad nos, thus far, that there is a Liberty left for Men upon extraordinary, and other just Occasions, sometimes to do otherwise than the Constitution requireth, extra casum scandali & contemptus. It seems reasonable to believe, That the chief Design of M. Placete (as of other Foreign Protestants on the like Occasion) is to oppose the usurp'd Authority of the See of Rome, in pretending to give out such Acts and Decrees; as shall bind the Consciences of Men, directly, immediately, and by their own proper Vertue; (b) the effect which must be, that they shall

F 2

like

Bishop San-  
derfon's  
Preface to  
xv Ser-  
mons, § 13.

(a) Particularly by the Pious and Learned Bp Taylor; 'Civil Laws (says he) oblige in Publick and Private, for Reason and for Empire, when the Cause ceases; and when it remains, when the Breach is Scandalous, and when it is not Scandalous: But the Canons of the Church oblige only for their Reason and Religion; for Edification and for Charity; when the thing is useful to others, or when it is good in it self: But the Authority it self being wholly for these Purposes, is a Ministry of Religion; but has in it nothing of Empire, and therefore does not oblige for it self, and by it self, but for the doing good and the avoiding evil; and this is that which is meant by the Cases of Contempt and Scandal. *Ibid.* B. III. C. IV. R. XVIII.

(b) The Papists teach, 'That humane Laws, especially the Ecclesiastical, bind the Consciences of Men; not



' not only in respect of the Obedience, but also in re-  
 ' spect of the things commanded ; and that by their  
 ' own direct, immediate, and proper Virtue. In  
 ' which Doctrine three things are worthy of Censure ;  
 ' I. That the Preeminence is given to Ecclesiastical  
 ' Laws above Secular. II. That the Indifferency of  
 ' the things is taken away, and a Necessity induced.  
 ' III. That the binding Power is made to flow from  
 ' the immediate Virtue of the Laws themselves.-----  
 ' From the last and greatest Error these two Absurdi-  
 ' ties follow : 1. That the Subject is tied to obey the  
 ' Constitution, in the rigour of it, upon all Occasions,  
 ' and notwithstanding all Inconveniences, no less than  
 ' the Laws of God. 2. That the Subject is bound to  
 ' obey, *ex intuitu precepti*, upon the bare Knowledge,  
 ' and by the bare Warrant thereof, without farther  
 ' Enquiry ; and consequently as well in unlawful things  
 ' as lawful. *Bishop Sanderfon's Sermon on 1 Pet. ii. 16.*

likewise oblige beyond the Cases of Con-  
 tempt and Scandal ; and therefore, the Que-  
 stion is here rais'd upon the latter Point, in  
 view of the former.

Our Author did not state his Question di-  
 rectly against the *Romanists*, that he might  
 take in those Reformed Professors, whom he  
 reports to have thus far concurr'd with them.  
 But since he afterwards restrains this Cén-  
 sure to Bishop *Sanderfon* only ; if it appears  
 that in this Point, he has intirely mistaken  
 Bishop *Sanderfon*, whose Judgment he so well  
 understood (and so happily made use of) in  
 others, the Question will be at an end among  
*Protestants* by his own Confession ; And that  
 he has thus mistaken the Bishop is evident,  
 from the Passages but now produced. Nor  
 do we find any other Doctrine, in the *Latin*  
*Treatise de obligatione Conscientiæ* ; to which  
 alone *M. Placete* might (possibly) refer. At  
 the

the end of the Seventh Lecture, that Great Professor having observ'd (what in the Sixth he had demonstrably prov'd) ' That no Man ' in his Wits can deny, but that new Laws ' may be enacted concerning Ecclesiastical ' Rights, Things and Persons, together ' with all the Circumstances of External ' Worship, belonging to Order, Piety and ' Edification; as to the Subject of this Power, ' whether it is seated wholly in the Ecclesi- ' astical, or wholly in the Civil Governor; ' declares, That he had then neither Leisure ' nor Inclination to enter into such a Debate, ' but that, here (as in most Cases) the mid- ' dle Opinion, that of our own excellent ' Church, seem'd the truer, and was certain- ' ly the safer; which, between the *Papists* ' and *Presbyterians* on the one side, and the ' *Eraſtians* and *Libertines* on the other, asserts ' the Right of framing Ecclesiastical Laws to ' be in the Bishops, Presbyters, and other ' Persons duely elected out of the Body of ' of the Clergy, and rightly conven'd in a ' lawful Synod; yet so that the exercise of ' this Power or Right in every Christian state, ' ought to depend on the supreme Civil Ma- ' gistrate, both *a parte ante*, as to the meet- ' ing of the Synod, and *a parte post*, as to ' the Confirmation of the Decrees. In this he is so far from following the *Romish* Opini- on, as exactly to agree with all the *Protestant* Churches Abroad, the *French* especially, as appears from the *Thesis* and Practice before alledg'd; though neither he nor they intend to prejudice the Original Right of the Church, when destitute of the Civil Protection and

Assistance. Had M. *Placete* maintain'd, that Ecclesiastical Ordinances did no way bind the *Conscience*, he would not only be at variance with Bishop *Sanderfon* ; but also with his own Church, and with himself : And therefore, when in one part of the Chapter he thus argues ; *If Ecclesiastical Laws obliged the Conscience, the Church would only have chang'd her Yoke, &c.* He means, if they obliged the *Conscience* in the rigorous and superstitious Manner above describ'd ; otherwise, his Consequence would be manifestly false.

It appears from what has been already observ'd, That we may wholly avoid this *strongest Reason*, because we are not bound to make this *Acknowledgement*. For, as Civil Magistrates, in their Laws about things indifferent, intend not to oblige the *Conscience* in Cases extraordinary, and of some pressing Necessity not otherwise well to be avoided, beyond the danger of Scandal and Contempt, because this Liberty is not the least Infringement of their Right, nor does any way hinder the ends of their Government ; so it seems highly credible, That they could not assume a Power of thus obliging, without equalling their Commands to those of God Himself ; it being a most reasonable Distinction between Divine Laws, and Laws meerly Humane, founded in the Nature of things enjoin'd, as well as in the Authority of the Law-givers, that the former shall oblige, perpetually, indispensably, upon all Occasions, under all Inconveniences ; the latter not.

This



This Argument, together with those two which follow, seems capable of being set in a better Light. As to this, the Church, in the enjoining indifferent things, would then abuse her Power, would destroy rather than edify, and would lay Snares for her Children, should she give them such Laws (not as they must Sin if they transgress'd, but) as they must acknowledge to bind directly, immediately, and by their own proper force, which seems incommunicably essential to the Laws of God: For otherwise, as all Power given by God is good and beneficial, so Disobedience to any lawful Power, commanding what is not unlawful, is properly a Sin.

This Argument is far different from that which some are not yet asham'd to urge, 'A Ceremonial Action enjoin'd by Authority ' is not good and virtuous; therefore, the ' Non-compliance with such an Action is not ' evil and criminal. By which Rule of Logick it likewise follows, That since the Work of no particular Calling is morally Good, therefore a Man's neglect of Working in his particular Calling is not morally Evil; since there is no Virtue in going or coming, buying or selling; therefore no Vice in a Child or Servant's refusing to go or come, to buy or sell, when commanded by the Parent or Master. The Judicious Author well apprehended the ridiculous Absurdity and Inconsequence of such Reasonings; the Abettors of which, may with less seeming Contradiction, tho' more Hardiness, assert, in the Words of their late Champion, that *indifferent things ought not to be the Subject of any* *Rights of Prot. Diss. p. 26.*

*De oblig. Consc. Prelect. VI. § 23.* *Rights of Prot. Diss. ibid.* *Laws.* A Tenet which Bishop *Sanderson* assures us, was first introduced to support the vain Pretensions of the *Stoicks*; and which, in our late unhappy Times of Distraction and Enthusiasm, he found but two Persons extravagant enough to defend; and probably, those two were yet more sober, than to build their Defence on this Principle, That the Advantage of Society is the End and Measure of Law-giving; from which, the direct contrary is wont to be inferr'd by the concurrent Reason of Mankind. But M. *Placete's* Argument, if rightly explain'd, will come into this necessary Form;

*Whatsoever absolutely binds the Conscience is morally Good.*

*Indifferent Actions enjoin'd by the Church are not morally Good; therefore,*

*Indifferent Actions enjoin'd by the Church do not absolutely bind the Conscience.*

To the Argument thus form'd, the Case of the *Pharisees* and Elders is exactly applicable. They imposed on the People their own Traditional Commands, as necessary in themselves, and absolutely obliging; which therefore became in all respects void and unobligatory, by reason of the unlawful and superstitious manner of their Imposition: Whereas, had they only made an Order, for Decency and Conveniency's sake, that no Man should sit down to Meat in Publick with unwashen Hands, and thus had still left the Consciences of the People free, the Parties disobeying would probably have been guilty of this *Pharisaical* Superstition, and not the Parties commanding; which is Bishop *Sanderson's*



derſon's Judgment, in his accurate Diſcourſe on the Text.

The Force of this Argument may perhaps be more clearly expreſs'd in other Words. One great Branch of Chriſtian Liberty reſpects the uſe of the Creatures, and of all indifferent things, in Oppoſition to the Legal Rites enjoin'd by God, under the *Jewiſh* Oeconomy : But now, if Eccleſiaſtical Preſcriptions about things indifferent abſolutely bind the *Conſcience*, this Branch of Chriſtian Liberty is defeated, we are entangled again in the Yoke of Bondage ; and what is more grievous, we are in Slavery to humane Ordinances, not to the Divine ; that is, to ſuch humane Ordinances as the Makers and Publiſhers would advance to an equality with the Divine. The whole Caſe of Ceremonies is with the greateſt Wiſdom and Temper explain'd by the Church of *England*, in the Declaration before her Liturgy, which cannot but be highly agreeable to all her Siſter Churches of the Reformation. *Although the keeping or omitting of a Ceremony, in it ſelf conſider'd, is but a ſmall thing, yet the wilful and contemptuous Tranſgreſſion, and breaking of a common Order and Diſcipline, is no ſmall Offence before God. As concerning thoſe Perſons which peradventure will be offended, for that ſome of the old Ceremonies are retained ſtill ; if they conſider, that without ſome Ceremonies, it is not poſſible to keep any Order, or quiet Diſcipline in the Church, they ſhall eaſily perceive juſt Cauſe to reform their Judgments. And if they think much that any of the Old do remain, and would rather have all deviſed anew : Then ſuch Men*

*Of Ceremonies, why ſome be Aboliſhed, &c.*

granting



granting some Ceremonies convenient to be had, surely where the Old may be well used, there they cannot reasonably reprove the Old, only for their Age, without bewraying of their own Folly. As those are taken away which are most abused, and did burden Mens Consciences without any Cause, so the other that remain, are retained for a Discipline and Order, which (upon just Causes) may be alter'd and chang'd, and therefore are not to be esteemed equal with God's Law. And moreover, they be neither dark nor dumb Ceremonies, but are so set forth, that every Man may understand what they do mean, and to what use they do serve; so that it is not like that they in time to come should be abused as other have been: And in these our doings we condemn no other Nations, nor prescribe any thing but to our own People only: For we think it convenient, that every Country should use such Ceremonies as they shall think best to the setting forth of God's Honour and Glory, and to the reducing of the People to a most perfect and godly Living, without Error or Superstition; and that they should put away other things, which from time to time they perceive to be most abused; as in Mens Ordinances it often chanceth diversly in divers Countries.

*Plerique  
nostri in  
Gallia The-  
ologi, &  
qui in Ang-  
lia Purita-  
ni dicti  
sunt  
Le Blanc.  
Theses de  
potest.  
temp. Papæ.*

Instead of replying to this Objection, we have seen, that we may very safely deny the Supposition. As to the disputed Text, the Generality of French Divines of the Protestant Communion, agree with our Dissenters, in maintaining, that it utterly prohibits all Conjunction of Civil and Ecclesiastical Power in the same Person. To which Interpretation of Mr. Calvin (tho beside the present Question) let us only oppose this more rational Exposition

position of Mr. *Hooker*; ‘ The very Truth  
‘ is, our Lord and Saviour did aim at a far  
‘ other Mark than these Men seem to ob-  
‘ serve. The end of his Speech was, to re-  
‘ form their particular Misperuasion to whom  
‘ he spake: And their Misperuasion was,  
‘ that which was also the common Fancy of  
‘ of the *Jews* at that time, that their Lord  
‘ being the *Messias* of the World, should re-  
‘ store unto *Israel* that Kingdom, whereof  
‘ the *Romans* had as then bereaved them :  
‘ They imagin’d, that he should not only de-  
‘ liver the state of *Israel*, but himself reign  
‘ as a King in the Throne of *David*, with  
‘ all secular Pomp and Dignity: That he  
‘ should subdue the rest of the World, and  
‘ make *Jerusalem* the Seat of an Universal  
‘ Monarchy. Seeing therefore they had for-  
‘ saken All to follow Him, being now in so  
‘ mean a Condition, they did not think but  
‘ that together with Him, they also should  
‘ rise in State, that they should be the First,  
‘ and the most advanced by Him. Of this  
‘ Conceit it came, that the Mother of the  
‘ Sons of *Zebedee* sued for her Children’s Pre-  
‘ ferment; and of this Conceit it grew, that  
‘ the Apostles began to question amongst  
‘ themselves, which of them should be the  
‘ greatest: And in Controulment of this  
‘ Conceit it was, that our Lord so plainly  
‘ told them, that the Thoughts of their  
‘ Hearts were vain. The Kings of Nations  
‘ have indeed their large and ample Domi-  
‘ nions; they Reign far and wide, and their  
‘ Servants they advance unto Honour in  
‘ the World; they bestow upon them large  
‘ and



‘ and ample Secular Preferments, in which  
‘ respect they are also term’d many of them,  
‘ Benefactors, because of the liberal Hand  
‘ which they use in rewarding such as have  
‘ done them service. But was it the mean-  
‘ ing of the ancient Prophets of God, that  
‘ the *Messias*, the King of *Israel*, should be  
‘ like unto these Kings, and his Retinue  
‘ grow in such sort as theirs? Wherefore,  
‘ ye are not to look for at my hands such  
‘ Preferments as Kings of Nations are wont  
‘ to bestow upon their Attendants: with  
‘ you not so. Your Reward in Heaven shall  
‘ be most ample; on Earth your chiefest  
‘ Honour must be to suffer Persecution for  
‘ Righteousness sake. Submission, Humili-  
‘ ty and Meekness, are things fitter for you  
‘ to inure your Minds withal, than these as-  
‘ piring Cogitations: If any amongst you be  
‘ greater than other, let him shew himself  
‘ greatest in being lowliest; let him be above  
‘ them in being under them, even as a Ser-  
‘ vant, for their good. These are Af-  
‘ fections which you must put on: as for  
‘ degrees of Preferment and Honour in this  
‘ World, if ye expect any such thing at my  
‘ Hands, ye deceive your selves, for in the  
‘ World your Portion is rather the clear con-  
‘ trary. Wherefore they who alledge this  
‘ Place against Episcopal Authority, (or else  
‘ to prove that Civil and Ecclesiastical Power  
‘ are in all respects incompatible,) ‘ abuse it;  
‘ they many ways deprave, and wrest it from  
‘ the true Understanding wherein our Sa-  
‘ viour himself did utter it. *Eccl. Pol. B.*  
VII. §. 16.



## C H A P. XI.

*Of the Obedience which Children owe to their Parents.*

THE Holy Scripture does not only command us to obey our Princes, and Pastors, but likewise our Parents: *Children Col.iii.20, obey your Parents in all things*, says St. Paul. We must except indeed from this General Precept whatever is Evil, or Sinful; the Rule of obeying God rather than Men, extending no less to our Parents than to other our Superiors.

To this Exception we may add, whatever is condemn'd by the Civil Laws, and forbidden by the Prince or Magistrate; for 'tis a never-failing Maxim, That the Command of an Inferior obliges not, when contrary to that of his Superior. The Authority of the Prince holds no less over the Father than over the Son; and consequently it renders the Father's Injunction to his Son null and invalid; so that the Son, in this Case, is not only excused from obeying his Father, but is oblig'd positively to disobey him.

Wherefore the Paternal Authority can properly take place only in things indifferent, and such as are not forbidden either by Divine or Human Laws. The Question is, How far the said Authority extends in this respect.

To clear the whole Matter, we must observe with *Grotius*, that the Children may be

be consider'd in three several States or Conditions. The first is, when they are as yet unable to govern themselves, their Reason being too weak and feeble to be the Rule of their Actions. The second is, when they have attained to greater degrees of Knowledge and of Light, yet being neither married, nor emancipated (or left to their own disposal) they continue to make a part of their Father's Family. The third is, when they are themselves Masters of separate Families.

'Tis agreed, that Children are bound to obey their Parents in all these Conditions ; but with some diversity. In the first of these three States, a Child is obliged to pay an absolute, unlimited Obedience ; whence St. *Gal. iv. 1.* Paul says, that *the Heir, while he is a Child, differs in nothing from a Servant.* This is what will admit of no Dispute.

'Tis likewise agreed, that in the third Estate, and even in the second, a Son who is call'd to the Exercise of a Civil, or Ecclesiastical Charge, ought not to be guided in the Duties of this Charge by the Will of his Father, but by his own Reason and Judgment.

'Tis no less generally affirm'd, that a Child ought not to marry against the Father's Consent : Yet in case the Father, purely out of an obstinate Humour, shall oppose the Son's just Inclinations, it is conceiv'd, that the Son, after having tried all possible ways of mollifying his Father, yet without Success, may proceed to do what the Laws permit in this respect. For the Father himself being  
subject

subject to the same Laws, 'tis not a breach of Duty towards him, either to omit that which the Laws suffer him not to command, or to do that which the Laws would not have him forbid.

I doubt not but it will be as easily granted me, that should the Father go about to oblige his Son, when already in a married State, to do any thing contrary to the Interest of his present Family, the Son is not bound to obey. Indeed, the Divine Law in saying that *a Man shall leave his Father and his Mother, and shall cleave to his Wife*, gives us Gen.ii.24: Matt. xix. 5, &c. clearly to understand, that the Son is no longer subject to his Father, in regard to the Affairs of the new Family, of which he is himself the Head.

All the Difficulty therefore is, to know, whether a Son, neither married, nor emancipated, but continuing a Member of his Father's Family, is bound to obey his Father in an indifferent thing which he judges to be, and which really is, contrary to his temporal Interest. For Example, the Son may be possess'd of some Goods, which are wholly independent of his Father, and of which he has not only the Property, but the Use and Disposal, or not only the *direct*, but the *profitable Dominion*, as some Authors express themselves: such is, what the Civilians term *peculium castrense*, & *quasi castrense*.

What if the Father should command his Son to dispose of these Goods, for the Benefit of himself, or of a third Person, is the Son's Obedience here necessary? And does  
he



he Sin against his Conscience in disobeying?

I cannot incline to the Affirmative; for, were this so, the Father would have a *direct Dominion* over these Goods, which 'tis agreed he has not; besides, there's no doubt but if the Father endeavour'd to take them from him, the Son might have recourse to the Assistance of the Laws, which would secure him in the Possession and Enjoyment of them. He is not, therefore, oblig'd to abandon them to his Father's Pleasure; the Paternal Authority, as well as all other Rights whatsoever, being limited by the Laws, and not capable of a farther extent than the Laws permit.

In a Word, the Son is bound to do nothing in Obedience to his Father, but what his Father may command him; and his Father can command him nothing contrary to the Appointment of the Laws, to which both are equally subject. All Commands, therefore, of the Father, contrary to the Laws, are null, and void, and no way obligatory, and such, by consequence, to which the Son is bound to pay no manner of deference or regard.

I should now proceed to speak of the Duty of Servants to their Masters; but because what has been said of the Duty of Subjects to their Sovereigns, and of Children to their Parents, may be likewise accommodated to Servants, it seems needless to enter into this particular Disquisition.

What I asserted at the beginning of the Chapter, that the Obedience which Children

dren owe their Parents, ought not to interfere with that which they owe the Civil Magistrate, is by no means satisfactory to *M. D.* Let me set down his whole Objection against what I offer'd on that Subject. *M. L. P. advances in the XI Chapter of the same Book, that 'tis a never-failing Rule, or a Rule without any Exception, that the Command of an Inferior obliges not, when 'tis contrary to that of his Superior; and he draws this Consequence from it, that the Authority of the Prince renders the Father's Command to the Son null and invalid, so that the Son in this Case, is not only excused from obeying his Father, but is oblig'd positively to disobey him. This Consequence appears directly opposite to the Moral Practice of all the Refugees who abandon'd France, and arraigns all those who carried away their Children, notwithstanding the King's Orders to the contrary, as truly and properly Man-stealers: For if the Rights of Princes, by virtue of their Superiority absorb those of Parents, 'tis certain that the Refugees had lost the Right of commanding their Children to leave the Kingdom with them; and that since they did thus command them, it could be only in the quality of Suborners and Seducers, who draw them off from the lawful Authority of the King, by continuing to exercise an Authority over them, which was before vacated by a Superior Authority. It would look but ill to affirm this; Yet is it necessary, either to confess the Crime, or to renounce the Principle; and perhaps the latter Expedient may not be the worse of the two.*

But I am surpriz'd to see a Person of *M. D.*'s Understanding thus except against me. In-

stead of concluding from my Principles, that the Parents did ill in carrying their Children out of *France*; every one ought to infer the direct contrary: To evince which, I need only suppose a Truth which *M. D.* will not contest. It is, that the Divine Law (I might say even the unchangeable Law of Nature) obliges Parents to take all possible care of the Salvation of their Children. If any one doubts of this, let him read the following Texts of Scripture; *Gen.* xviii. 19. *Deut.* vi. 6, 7. *Psal.* lxxviii. 5, 6. *Eph.* vi. 4. *1 Tim.* v. 8.

But if Parents are obliged, by the Law of God, to take any the least care of the Salvation of their Children, will it be question'd, whether they ought to rescue them from a Place, where their Salvation was in so imminent Danger, as that to which they were expos'd in *France*, where 'twas morally impossible but that they should be lost? Could they have innocently left them, either in an infectious Town, or in a ruinous Building, or an House on Fire? And is the Danger of all these Accidents any way proportionable to that which threatned them from the Cruelties of their own Native Country?

Supposing this, I say, That those Parents who had Children in *France* were obliged to take no notice of the several Prohibitions to their Removal. This flows naturally and visibly from two Principles, which I laid down in the same place: The First is, That in case our Superiors, whosoever they are, whether Kings, or Parents, or Pastors, enjoin us such things as are evil and sinful, it is then





number of them proceed from our Actions ; and amongst these Actions there are Five Principal Kinds which produce this Effect, Contracts, bare Promises, Oaths, Vows, and for the most, all Instances of Justice: I shall say nothing of Vows, because whatever I may observe of Oaths, will likewise be applicable to them : But I shall spend some time in illustrating those Obligations which are deriv'd from the other Heads ; and I shall begin with Contracts.

Should I undertake to go through all the particular Species of Contracts, I must engage my self in an excessive length of Discourse : And besides, this is more properly the Subject of Law, than of Divinity ; therefore, not to enter into the whole Detail, I shall be contented to Remark, with what Brevity I can, that which is most common, or general, in all these sorts of Conventions.

By a Contract I understand an Agreement, or Convention, between two, or more Persons, who all oblige themselves to a certain Performance. This Definition alone discovers evidently to us, That a Contract produces an Obligation : And indeed, when we have engaged our selves to do any thing, especially if we have Covenanted, or Stipulated, that the Persons with whom we treat, shall likewise do somewhat on their part ; 'tis clear, that we cannot without manifest Injustice, dispence with the Performance to which we have tied our selves.

Yet there are some Exceptions to this General Rule ; and since each Exception has its peculiar Difficulties, it may be proper to consider them one by one.

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*The First Exception taken from the Qualities of the Parties contracting.*

Some Persons are incapable of making a valid Contract, or of truly and effectually obliging themselves: Such are Infants, Naturals, and in General, all those who have not the use of their Reason. If, therefore, we treat with Persons of this Character, we cannot bind them to keep the Engagements which they make; and if we compel them to a Performance, we offer them such an Injustice as, without Reparation, is unpardonable.

We apprehend from hence, That Persons who have obliged themselves being in this Condition, are by no means under a necessity of standing to their Agreements; only there is some Difficulty as to the case of Children. The time at which they acquire the use of Reason, does not consist in an indivisible Point. It certainly admits of some Latitude; not only because some acquire this use of their Faculties sooner than others, but because it is never acquir'd but by degrees; yet we are concern'd to have some precise Rule in this Point, that we may know how to steer accordingly: For which Reason, the Laws have fixed such a certain Age, before which they declare all Engagements to be void, and of none effect; and after which, they appoint them to stand with full Force: Yet the same Age is not limited for all sorts of Contracts; there being some which cannot be made till the Fourteenth Year, others] not till the Twenty-fifth.



Nor is this Rule so exact, but that if a Person should, for Instance, be of so dull a Capacity, as not to have, at the time fixed by the Law, sufficient Understanding truly and effectually to oblige himself, others shall be permitted to impose on his Simplicity, and to engage him, under the pretence of a Contract, to what they please. This Pretence would, no doubt, be unjust ; and we may say, that on these Occasions, as well as on many others, we ought rather to follow the Intention of the Law-giver, than the Letter of the Law.

But the Question which seems to be of the greatest Importance is, Whether a Young Person who has obliged himself before the Legal Time, is bound in *Conscience* to make good his Promise ? For Example, Whether he who has taken up a Loan during his Minority, is bound to pay when he comes of Age.

The Casuists of the Church of *Rome*, not excepting the most rigid of that Number, answer with a Distinction. ‘ If the Party  
‘ (say they) has made a good use of what he  
‘ borrow’d, and in general, if the Contract  
‘ prov’d useful and advantageous to him, he  
‘ is obliged to fulfil it : But he is not thus  
‘ obliged, if the Agreement did not turn to  
‘ his Gain and Profit ; and if, for Instance, he spent what he borrow’d in Extravagance and Debauchery.

For my own part, I am by no means of this Opinion. I cannot think, that we ought to find our Gain in any Evil that we have done ; or that we can release our selves by our *Crime*, from an Engagement, into which

we entred with *Innocence*. I would therefore, have some other Circumstances consider'd : As, in the first place, Whether the *Lender*, by the Rescission of the Contract, loses any thing which would have otherwise belong'd to him : For if he loses nothing, nor otherwise suffers, but in not gaining so much as he desir'd, I think the Young Person is not bound to make good what he promis'd in this manner.

But if he shall be a Loser, as in the case of Loans it usually happens, then I would have a Second thing consider'd ; and that is, Whether he made the Loan *Bona fide*, and without any ill Design ; as also, Whether he foresaw the ill Use that might be made of what was borrow'd : If he did foresee this, and, in a Word, if he had any evil Intention, he deserves to lose what he lent to so bad a purpose, and he is to thank himself for all he suffers.

But if he made the Loan honestly and sincerely, I cannot think that the Young Borrower is excus'd from Payment ; on the contrary, I am perswaded, that to refuse in this case, and to plead the benefit of the Law, is so indirect a Practice, as any Man (not to say of a nice and tender *Conscience*, but) of common Honesty, ought to be ashamed of.

*The Second Exception, taken from the Errors and the Frauds which may attend a Contract.*

We have here a Second Exception, which is likewise of great weight. 'Tis possible, there may be some Error or Mistake, or some Fraud, in the making of a Contract : Both these Defects may perhaps meet in the same

Contract; or one of them may happen without the other. There may be Fraud without Error; as when one Party apprehends the Design of the other to circumvent him, and yet continues the Negotiation: Or there may be Error without Fraud; one of the Parties being under a Mistake, into which the other did not lead him, and both acting with upright Intention: But in the most frequent Instances, there is a concurrence of Fraud and Error, of Fraud on the one side, and of Error on the other.

'Tis easy to apprehend, That when there happens to be Fraud without Error, the Contract is valid, and the Obligation subsists; but 'tis not the same in other Cases. There are Instances in which Error and Fraud rescind a Contract. There are Instances too, in which they leave it good and valid: And this is what we ought more distinctly to examine, or explain.

In order to which, it should be consider'd, That sometimes the Fraud and Error have for their Object, the very Substance about which the Parties treat: As when a Man sells what he has not, or sells one Species for another; a Vessel of Copper, instead of one of Gold; a piece of Crystal instead of a Diamond, &c. Sometimes the Error happens only in the Quality of the Subject: As when a Man puts off damag'd Wares for good.

Again, the Fraud and the Error are both distinguished into *Effective* and *Concomitant*. The *Effective* is such as moves and inclines us to Bargain, which we would not have done, had we known the Truth. The *Concomitant*



is such, as if discover'd would not have hinder'd the Bargain ; so that had we known all, we should have been contented to treat on the same Terms, tho' we might have endeavour'd to render them more easy and favourable.

Lastly, the Fraud may proceed either from one of the Parties transacting, or from a third Person, who has some share in making the Agreement. Regard is to be had in these Particulars, in judging of the validity, or invalidity of Contracts.

If the Error be about the Substance, Whether it be a pure Mistake in one of the Parties, or be occasion'd by the Fraud of the other, or of a third Person ; at least, when this Error is *Effective*, so that without it we would not have enter'd into this Treaty ; 'tis agreed, that the Contract is then nul before God and Man. Indeed, this could not be stiled a true Contract ; for a Contract is properly nothing else but the Union of two Wills concurring about the same Object ; but there's no such thing in the present Case : The Wills of the two Parties are as different as possible, and terminate in two different Objects ; so that here's no Union or Concurrence, and therefore no Contract.

If the Error be only *Concomitant*, and such as that we should not have been hinder'd from treating on the same Conditions, tho' we had known the Truth, the Contract is valid, and the Obligation stands in its Force.

But the Case is different, if we should not have treated except on other Conditions. I am persuaded, that an Error of this kind  
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renders the Contract nul, if not in Civil Courts, yet at least in the Court of *Conscience*; and I say the same as to an Error in the Qualities. This, I think, is undeniably true; for who can doubt, but that a Man who has deceived another, whether in the Qualities, or in the Conditions, has sinn'd against Charity and Justice! Who can doubt, but that such a Person has violated St. Paul's

1 *Theff.* iv. 6. Injunction, *Let no Man go beyond, or defraud his Brother, in any matter, for the Lord is the Avenger of all such?* Who can doubt, but that the way of Gain here mention'd is unlawful, and such as obliges to Restitution?

It will perhaps be said, That Civil Laws determine otherwise, at least in some certain Cases. I confess, they do; yet not because they approve or authorize the Cheat, whatever be the Object or Occasion of it. The true and only Reason is, That they do all they can to prevent Multiplicity of Suits; and therefore they proceed here almost upon the same Principle, which mov'd them to introduce *Prescription*, after Possession for such a number of Years. Now this is not because the length of Time can indeed impower an unjust Detainer to perpetuate his Possession, or dispense with his Obligation to refund and restore: But because it is for the Interest of the Publick to retrench the number of Suits as far as possible; and because 'tis better that the Laws should wink at some Instances of Injustice, than that they should suffer Quarrels and Contentions to run on, without number or end.

*The Third Exception, Of Contracts.*

Contracts upon Force are of Three kinds : The First are those which may be strictly and properly so term'd ; as if the Party with whom we treat should violently lay hold on our Hand, and oblige us to sign an Agreement, of which we declare our Abhorrence. The Second are those to which we are compell'd by Fear ; but by a just and lawful Fear, or such as has for its Object a great and formidable Evil, as Death, Slavery, Stripes, &c. The last are those into which we are led, by the Apprehension of some slighter Evil, and such as does not deserve our Fear.

It is certain, That Contracts of the first sort are nul and void ; and that those of the third sort are not. This admits of no Difficulty. As for those of the second kind, the Civil Laws declare them to be invalid ; and I make no doubt, but that they are so likewise in the Court of *Conscience*. Indeed, 'tis not easy to apprehend, how any lawful Right should be acquir'd by so unjust an Action as Constraint ; or how the Agreement, on the other part, should be stiled voluntary : So that in strict Speech, there is no manner of Contract in the present Case.

In my Treatise of *Restitution*, and in the Supplement to it, Entituled, *Divers Treatises on Matters of Conscience* ; I have, with some Care and Diligence, examin'd several Questions which relate to this Subject of Contracts : Particularly, I have retracted what I here assert, That a slighter Fear does not invalidate an Agreement. See the *Treatise of Restitution*, pag. 266.



## C H A P. XIII.

*Of Promises.*

There are two sorts of Promises. Some require a certain thing to be performed by those to whom they are made, and are therefore Conditional. Others are purely Gratuitous. The First are indeed a particular Species of Contracts, and so do not oblige us to consider them separately. 'Twill be sufficient to confine our selves to the Second; which may be term'd simple, or bare Promises.

Now, to make a true and real Promise, it is not enough to say, that we have resolved to do, or to give such or such a thing. We may have this Will or Inclination, and may change it the next Moment, without giving the Party it was intimated or discover'd unto, any the least reason to complain. Nor is it enough to say, That we have resolved never to change this Inclination; for such a Resolution may it self be alter'd, without Unfaithfulness or Inconstancy, provided we have reason to alter it, as very probably we may have.

To Promise, therefore, is to say expressly and formally, That we will do thus, or thus; or that we will give this, or that, for then 'tis impossible for us not to do, or not to give accordingly, without falsifying our Word. The Reason is, because he who says, *I will give*, or *I will do*, affirms not only his present Inclination, but the future Event; and there-

therefore, if the Event does not follow accordingly, there was a Falsity in what he said, which cannot but be culpable.

Upon this Principle, the *Civilians* maintain, That Promises naturally oblige those who made them ; and that the Non-performance of them is a real Injustice : Which *Grotius* in particular proves, from that saying of the Wise-Man ; *My Son, if thou be Surety for thy Friend ; if thou hast stricken thy Hand with a Stranger, thou art snared with the Words of thy Mouth, thou art taken with the Words of thy Mouth.* *Prov. vi*  
*1, 2.*

And needs must Promises oblige, since God Himself is pleas'd to acknowledge some sort of Obligation, after he has promis'd us. For which reason the Scripture stiles him Faithful, to denote, that what he has once promis'd, he will most surely and exactly perform.

There are, it is true, some particular Cases, in which the Obligation arising from our Promise expires. As for Instance, when that which we have Promis'd is unjust, and repugnant to the Divine Will. Even an Oath (as we shall see hereafter) added to such a Promise, does not render it more inviolable.

The same Judgment is to be made, as to the Impossibility which we find of executing our Promise ; whether the thing was impossible at the time when the Promise was made, or whether it became so afterwards.

Again, when the Party for whose sake we thus engaged our selves, renders himself unworthy of our Favour and good Will, he releases

releases us from our Engagement to him, in this respect.

Lastly, the Arrival of some unexpected Accidents, which if foreseen would have prevented our Promise, will likewise justify us in not fulfilling it.

When any thing of this kind intervenes, we do not alter our Disposition. We persist in the same Will as before ; and we may venture to say, that we made all our Promises with a tacit reserve, excluding such Accidents and Events : And that they are not to be otherwise understood, seems evident from hence, that no one censures those who are hinder'd from executing what they have promis'd, by any of the foremention'd Reasons. We see then, that they are always interpreted under these Restrictions ; and consequently, that we injure no Man, when in any such excepted Case, we forbear that which we had otherwise obliged our selves to perform.

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## C H A P. XIV.

### *Of Promissory Oathes.*

**T**Here are several Species of Oathes, but we speak here of those only which are applied to confirm and enforce our Contracts and Promises, or of those by which we oblige our selves to do, or not to do certain things hereafter, calling God to Witness for the Truth of what we say, and consenting that  
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his severe Vengeance should overtake us, upon our Default.

This is enough to demonstrate, that we do not only Sin, when at the time of our Swearing we have no design to execute what we Swore ; but likewise, if having then such a Design, we afterwards change our Intention ; For by an Oath we engage our selves to persist in our present Resolution. But this is not all ; we engage our selves to perform what we resolve, and we engage our selves in the strongest, the most irrevocable, and most sacred manner in the World.

'Tis for this reason that the Holy Scripture so strictly enjoins us to keep what we have promis'd with an Oath : *If a Man (says Numb. the Law) vow a Vow unto the Lord, or swear xxx. 3. an Oath to bind his Soul with a Bond, he shall not break his Word ; he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his Mouth : And David, giving the Picture of a good and righteous Man, says expressly, He that sweareth to his Psa. xv. 4. own hurt, and changeth not.*

Nor is this all yet : 'Tis certain, that his Sin who wilfully violates his Oath, is a Sin of the most heinous Nature, and beyond which we cannot easily conceive a farther degree of Impiety and Guilt. By our Oath, as was before observ'd, we invoke God as a Witness to the Truth of what we affirm ; and subject our selves freely to his Vengeance, if we fail in the Execution : Wherefore by thus failing, we consent to be pursued, and overwhelm'd by these terrible Judgments. What brutish Stupidity would it be to entertain the least doubt, whether  
this

this will accordingly happen ? What Idea must we have of God, how must we affront and insult him, if we believe not that he will surely keep his Word ?

We may learn how abominable this Sin is in the Sight of God, by considering what the Prophet says to King Zedekiah, who had broken his Oath of Fidelity taken to the King  
*Ezek. xvii. of Babylon : Behold, says he, the King of Babylon is come to Jerusalem; and hath taken the King thereof, and the Princes thereof, and led them with him to Babylon ; and hath taken of the King's Seed, and made a Covenant with him, and hath taken an Oath of him ; he hath also taken the mighty of the Land : That the Kingdom might be base, that it might not lift up it self, but by keeping of his Covenant, it might stand : But he rebelled against him, in sending his Ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him Horses and much People : Shall he prosper, shall he escape that doth such things ? Or, shall he break the Covenant, and be delivered ? As I Live, surely mine Oath that he hath despised, and my Covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompence upon his own Head.*

This has been ever the Persuasion of all those who have been touch'd with any Sense of Piety. *Jephtha*, in the Old Testament, gives us a memorable Example, how deeply he was affected with the Necessity and Justice of this Duty ; when, having obliged himself to offer to God the first thing that should meet him, at his Return from the Defeat of the *Amonites* ; and being met first by his only Daughter, who came to Congratulate his Success, he demurr'd not concerning the Per-

Performance : *Her Father* (says the Text) *Judges xi.*  
*did with her according to his Vow.* 39.

But we need not have recourse to the Sacred History. The *Pagans* themselves have acknowledg'd the Justice of the same Duty, and have said many excellent things on this Subject ; which are to be found in the Works of those who have been at the Pains of collecting them.

Hence we may conclude, how just a matter of Grief it is to every *Christian* Heart, to see Men of that Name and Profession, so forgetful in these Respects, as unworthily to trample on so holy and indispensable a Duty. What is more frequent amongst us, than Oathes rashly made, and lightly broken ? Men foolishly and brutishly engage themselves to any thing which comes into their Thoughts, and then make no scruple of failing in the Execution. Some there are, who having fallen under this double Unhappiness, and having therefore had Opportunity of learning, by what had befallen them, how great an Imprudence it was voluntarily to bind themselves for the future, and to abridge themselves of the Liberty which God had given them, have yet again repeated the Offence, and have exposed themselves to the danger of carrying it to its last and fatal Height, by violating with the same Impiety, the Oathes which they have made with the same Imprudence.

Three things there are which seem chiefly to contribute to the reigning Custom of this Sin. The First is, That there are indeed but small remains of Piety and Religion in

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the Word ; and that the greatest part of those who profess *Christianity*, are very far from understanding and fulfilling the Obligations of it.

The Second is, That most Men are so enslav'd and abandon'd to their Passions, as scarce to leave themselves any shadow of Liberty, when any Desire, and especially when any Resentment arises in their Heart. Thus without examining what they say, or what they do, they swear at all Adventures ; and since what they have thus engaged is for the most part contrary to their Interest, they stick not to break through these Engagements, when they cannot perform them without some Inconvenience and Disorder in their Affairs.

The Third thing is, That many Persons are prepossess'd with two very gross, and very dangerous Errors. I have met with those who imagin'd, That an Oath once broken ceas'd to oblige ; and that therefore, though the first Failure were a Sin, yet a Man might fail a Thousand times afterwards without Sinning.

Upon this Principle, I have seen Gamblers, who after some considerable Loss, having obliged themselves never to Play during their Life ; and having not Resolution enough to keep their Oath, have broke it at first with Reluctance, and ever after without Concern.

These Persons consider'd not that 'tis alike false and ridiculous to imagine, That an Act of Sin should release us from an Obligation ; which neither our best Actions, nor  
any

any thing howsoever Great and Auguft, or Sacred in Life, can (I will not fay defeat and evacuate, but) diminish or impair:

They confider not, that each of thefe new Acts is no lefs contrary to their Oath, than the Firft; and therefore a new Perjury, a new Contempt of God, and fuch as equally calls for his Vengeance.

The other Miftake, which is ftill more common, and therefore more dangerous, is a Conceit of many Men, that whofoever is in the wrong when he makes an Oath, not only may, but ought to break it; and therefore fuch Oathes as thefe, which we are now fpeaking of, being generally rafh, they fancy themfelves permitted wholly to forget, or difregard them.

This kind of Doctrin would indeed be convenient, provided it were true. We muft own, it feldom happens that an Oath concerning the future is not rafh and imprudent; for who, without Precipitancy and Folly, would oblige himfelf to any thing, of which he knows fo little, as we all know of what is to come? So that were there no Guilt in breaking an Oath which we ought not to have made, there would be very few which we ought to keep, and we fhould fcarce ever find an occafion to deferve the Character of the Royal Prophet, *He that fwareth to his own hurt and changeth not.*

What Law has ever vacated a Contract, for this reafon only, that a Man, before he pafs'd it, did not ufe all fuch Precautions as Prudence might have directed? Or, who would be fecure in Civil Society, if Men were



allow'd to renounce these Engagements at Pleasure.

We may therefore have done ill in Swearing, and yet be still bound to make good what we have Sworn; and this is what happens in most Cases: Yet, because we ought to make some Exceptions, these shall be consider'd in the following Chapters.

## C H A P. XV.

### *Of Oathes which engage to an Impossibility.*

**I**T has been usual to make Four Exceptions to the Rule which I have laid down at the close of the preceding Chapter; and to exclude from the Number of such Oathes as we are bound to keep. I. Those, the Objects of which are things absolutely impossible. II. Those which engage to evil or sinful Actions. III. Those which are made purely upon Mistake. IV. Those which were extorted from us by Constraint and Violence. What is wont to be said on these Four Species of Oathes is not equally certain; it will be convenient to examine each in particular, if we would know whether we have the Liberty of receding from them.

The first sort is that which admits the least Difficulty. It can never so happen, as that we should be obliged to do a thing absolutely impossible; whether it be thus in it self, and at all times, or whether having been possible when



when the Oath was made, it becomes impossible afterwards; which is often the Case of Debtors, who being able to pay at the time when they borrow'd, some time after become Insolvent.

In this Case 'tis agreed, That the Oath ceases to bind; yet there are Three Considerations which seem here of great Importance. First, That when the Impossibility we find of doing what we have engaged is not absolute, but only the Difficulty so great, that 'tis not probable we should surmount it, tho' we are not in this Case bound to succeed, yet we are still obliged to use our utmost Endeavours, and to act as we should if the thing were really Feasible in the highest Degree.

'Tis otherwise, if the thing prove absolutely impossible; for if we are fully convinced of this Impossibility as we are not bound to succeed, so neither are we obliged to strive, or labour about it.

The Second Consideration is, that in case what we have promis'd to perform is impossible as to the whole, yet if it be still possible in any part, we are obliged to perform that part. Thus, when I have sworn to give, or pay an Hundred Crowns, if I have but Fifty I am bound to deliver those Fifty. The half was visibly comprized in the Promise of the whole. I engaged for the Former in promising the Latter. I am able thus far to keep my Engagement; and therefore I cannot, in this respect, violate it without Sin.

The Third Consideration relates to things which are not always impossible, but being

so at one time, cease to be so at another. It is askt here, whether the Obligation which was extinguished by the Impossibility supervening, be again reviv'd by the Possibility which follows.

To give a right Answer to this Question, we ought to distinguish concerning the Sense of the Promise. Was it so annexed to a certain Time, as that nothing was engaged for at any other Time? Upon such a Supposition, there's no doubt but that the Obligation is utterly extinct and null, by reason of the Impossibility which we lye under, of performing it at the time thus limited and expressed.

But if the Promise were general and indefinite, as when, without naming any time, I promise to give, or to pay, 'tis evident, that the Impossibility of executing such a Promise, does not take away its Obligation, but at the most, can only suspend the Effect. The Engagement still subsists, and will exert its full Force whenever the Impossibility shall cease.

It must withal be acknowledg'd, that what I have offer'd on this Point, is not sufficient for our Direction on all Occasions. Suppose that in swearing to give, to pay, or to do any thing, I have bound my self to a certain Day: Suppose, likewise, that I am unable to perform it on the Day appointed; am I released from this Oath? and am I not indebted (for Instance) to him that lent me a Sum *Bona fide*, in case I prove responsible hereafter?



To determine in this manner, would be absurd and ridiculous. Wherefore, to remove all Difficulties, and to shew how far we are hereby engag'd, we are to enquire, whether the time thus limited were the principal Motive to the Promise, so that we would not have promis'd for any other Period ? Or, whether we would have made the same Promise indifferently, for any time that should have been requir'd. If the Former, then the Impossibility happening at that precise point of time, defeats the Obligation : If the Latter, then the Obligation which we contracted stands in Force.

For Example : A Merchant obliges himself to sell such a Commodity at a certain Price, and names a particular Time when he knows he can thus afford it : But he does not oblige himself to sell it at any other Time for the same Price, when he has reason to think that he can put it off at a better Market. Here, if an absolute Impossibility hinder him from keeping his Word at the Time prefixed, this is enough, and he is released from it for ever.

It is not so in the Promise which I make my Creditor, to satisfy him at a certain Day agreed upon between us ; because 'tis certain, that if my Creditor had fixed any later Day, I should gladly have accepted it. In this Case, therefore, my Promise stands good, and I am bound to fulfil it whenever I am able, tho' I happen not to be so at the Day appointed. These Matters carry their own Evidence with them, and seem not to stand in need of farther Proof.



## C H A P. XVI.

*Of Oathes which engage to unjust Actions.*

THE Second Order, or Class of Oathes, which do not oblige, comprizeth those the matter of which is Evil and Unjust, whether in its own Nature, or by virtue of some positive Law Divine or Humane. 'Tis certain, That as we Sin in making such Oathes, we Sin likewise in observing them : And therefore, if we are so unhappy as to have brought our selves under an Engagement of this kind, we are first to bewail our Sin before God, and to implore his Pardon with hearty Sorrow, and Confusion of Face, and then to resolve, that we will forbear the Performance. This was the Course which *David* took, when *Abigail* had represented to him his Rashness, in obliging himself by a most unjust Oath, to destroy the whole House of *Nabal*. And *Herod* would have done much better to imitate this great Example, when he had promis'd *Salome* with an Oath, to give her whatever she desired, than to believe, that this Oath obliged him to gratify her with the Head of *John* the Baptist.

This is allow'd for a constant Rule, by all Divines, and I have not met with any one that question'd it ; yet we must confess, that there are two considerable Objections which seem to demonstrate the contrary. The first may be taken from *Joshua's* Treatment of the *Gibeonites*, and the second from *Jephtha's* Vow. As

As to the First, God had expressly commanded the *Israelites*, utterly to extirpate the Seven Nations inhabiting the Land of *Canaan*; *When the Lord thy God shall deliver Deut. vii, them before thee, thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them, thou shalt make no Covenant with them, nor shew Mercy unto them.* Yet the *Gibeonites*, who as a part of the *Hivites*, were included in this Order, having surprized *Joshua* into a belief, that they belong'd to a Country far remote from *Palestine*; and having made a League with them, by which he engag'd to grant them their Lives, this holy Man was of Opinion, that the League ought nevertheless to be observ'd; and *Saul* was afterwards severely punished for the Violation of it, as we read in the Sequel of the Sacred History.

We have here an Instance of an Oath which was thought to oblige, tho' it seems contrary to the Law of God. The same may be said of *Jephtha's* Vow. God had forbidden the offering of humane Victims, and expressly condemn'd the Barbarity of such a Practice; yet this great Person, having bound himself to Sacrifice to God whatever should meet him first, at his Return from defeating the *Ammonites*, and being first met by his Daughter, did with her according to his Vow.

These two Objections appear with some Force; yet I can by no means think it impossible to remove them. What *Grotius* has offer'd to the Former seems very reasonable: He maintains, That the fore-cited Law did not enjoin the Extirpation of the People of *Palestine*, but only in case of their refusing  
to



Deut. xx.  
10, 11.

to submit, agreeably to that other Law, *When thou comest nigh unto a City, to fight against it, then proclaim Peace unto it; and it shall be, if it make thee answer of Peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be that all the People that is found therein, shall be Tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee.* This he proves by the Example of *Rahab*, and of those *Canaanites* who submitted to *Solomon*. According to this Supposition, *Joshua's* Act was not contrary to the Law of God, and therefore cannot be urged so as to overthrow what we now assert.

Lev. xxvii  
28, 29.

As to the other Objection, we may reply, That altho' God had forbidden the Custom of offering humane Sacrifices, yet he had expressly required and commanded the Death of such Persons as were devoted by an *Anathema*. The Words of the particular Law are these; *No devoted thing that a Man shall devote unto the Lord, of all that he hath, both of Man and Beast, and of the Field of his Possession, shall be sold or redeemed: Every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord. None devoted, which shall be devoted of Men, shall be redeemed, but shall surely be put to Death.*

It cannot therefore be evinc'd, that either *Joshua* or *Jephtha* obliged themselves by their Oath, to any thing condemn'd by the Law of God: So that what we have said will hold good; and we have reason to conceive, that we can never be bound to do that which God has forbidden.

I say the same of those Oathes which engage to the not doing of what God has commanded: For indeed, it is no less a Sin to omit



omit what God commands, than to do what he forbids; and therefore every Oath by which a Man shall promise, directly or indirectly, not to do a thing good, necessary, holy, and commanded by God, is null, and void of all Power to oblige.

But 'twill be askt, What are we to think of such Oathes as engage to the doing of some smaller Good that hinders the doing of a greater? For Instance, I have sworn to give a Sum of Money now in my Hands, to certain poor People, whose Circumstances I know are not pressing: I have sworn this to my self only, without making any one privy to it: (which I add, to obviate an Objection that might otherwise be urg'd.) But before I have executed this Resolution, I meet with other poor Objects, whose Necessities are of the extremest kind, and yet whom I cannot otherwise assist, but by disposing of to them what I designed to bestow on the Former.

I Answer, That in the Case propos'd, and in all others of the like Nature, where the Question is not only about a greater Good, but such a greater Good as we should be bound to do, and to prefer, if we had not sworn, the Oath does not oblige, and therefore need not be regarded by us: For indeed, if we are bound to do this greater Good (such as I now suppose it to be) we Sin in not doing so; and by consequence, in swearing not to do it, we engage to commit a Sin, which cannot but render the Oath null and unlawful.

It would quite alter the Case, if we were not bound to prefer this greater Good to the smaller;

smaller ; as in the Judgment of Bishop *Sanderſon*, may poſſibly happen. What he ſays on this point, is not without ſome Difficulties. I ſhall not here ſtay to examine it, becauſe the Diſcuſſion would be prolix, and does by no means fall in with our preſent Enquiry.

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## C H A P. XVII.

### *Of Oathes made purely upon Deception.*

**I**T is a Queſtion charged with more Difficulties than any other in the whole compaſs of this Subject, Whether we are bound to the obſervation of thoſe Oaths which we have made purely upon Deception ? *Joſhua*, for Example, was induc'd to make a League with the *Gibeonites*, only becauſe they had deceiv'd him, in pretending to come from a diſtant Country, whereas they dwelt in *Paleſtine*, and were of the number of thoſe People whom God enjoin'd the *Iſraelites* to deſtroy. Now, are we under a neceſſity of performing ſuch Oaths or not ?

All thoſe who have treated of this Queſtion, at leaſt as many of them as have fallen under my Knowledge, apply a diſtinction here, which I have touch'd upon in another Place. The Miſtake on which an Oath is grounded, may either relate to the Subſtance of the thing, or to ſome of its Qualities. If the Miſtake were in the Subſtance, as when I take a Veſſel of Copper for one of Gold,

Gold, or one Person for another, they agree that the Oath does not oblige; and that if, for Example, I have contracted my self to a Woman, supposing her to be, a Person who she is not, I lie under no Engagement to marry her.

So far, therefore, we meet with nothing that is difficult; and indeed the only difficulty would be to believe that Oaths of this sort could bind us to fulfil them. But if the Mistake were only in the Qualities, as if, for Instance, I marry a Woman, whom I suppose to be Young and Rich, and Virtuous, but find her quite otherwise, Bishop *Sander-son* and *Amesius* maintain, that such an Oath obliges, and their chief Foundation is the Example of *Joshua* before-cited.

*Grotius*, and the Casuists of the Church of Rome, are not altogether so severe. They go farther than the Distinction but now mention'd; because there may indeed be no less fatal an Error, as to the Qualities of a thing, than as to the Substance it self. Thus, should a Man contract himself to a loose Woman, supposing her Honest, would not the Mistake be much more unhappy, than if he had only taken one Honest Woman instead of another. How is it probable, therefore, that the first of these Oaths should be valid, and that the second should not?

For which reason, these Authors would have another thing consider'd: And that is, Whether we would have sworn, in a Case of this Nature, if we had known the Truth. If we answer positively, and without demur, that we would not, they hold the Oath  
unobli-



unobligatory, because it does not affect the thing as it really is, but as it was in our Opinion.

But if we are perswaded, That had we known the Truth, we should have sworn nevertheless: or, if we doubt whether we should or not, they maintain that the Oath is binding, and must of necessity be observ'd.

As for the Example of *Joshua*, *Grætius* answers to it by presupposing what I have already mention'd, That God did not enjoin the utter extirpation of the *Canaanites*, but only in case they should obstinately refuse to surrender themselves at Discretion. That if the *Gibeonites* had truly and sincerely declared themselves, *Joshua* would have receiv'd them, tho' not as Friends and Allies, (which he really did, according to the Terms of the League) yet as Slaves to the *Israelites*. When therefore he was acquainted with the Truth, he did not perform the Treaty according to the strict tenour of it, but agreeably to that Form in which he would have made it, had he before obtain'd the like Information: He condemn'd them to be Hewers of Wood, and Drawers of Water; that is, to perpetual Servitude. So that if *Saul* was afterwards punish'd on their account, it was not for violating the first Agreement made with them, but it was for not observing those Conditions which *Joshua* impos'd on them, after he had found the Deceit, and for putting many of them to Death, as is expressly recorded in the Sacred History.

2 Sam. xx.  
f.

This Reply seems very probable, and I think the Opinion on which it is founded to have

have so much Justice, that I cannot dissent from it. It is difficult to apprehend, that an Oath should change the Nature of a Contract, and that if a Contract be void in it self, as it is without doubt when grounded upon an Error, especially when the Error proceeds from a wicked and fraudulent Design, the Accession of an Oath should render it good and valid.

Nor is it more easie to conceive, that the Laws of all Nations, which agree in vacating these Contracts, tho' confirm'd by Oaths, should be unjust. These are my Thoughts, which I submit to the Judgment of my Readers.

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### C H A P. XVIII.

*Of Oaths upon Force, or those which are extorted by such a fear as is able to shake a Man of Constancy and Resolution.*

**I**T is usual for Robbers to oblige those who fall into their Hands, by a Promise upon Oath, that they will furnish them with such a Sum of Money, threatening them with Death if they refuse to swear. The Question is, Whether such Oaths are really binding, or whether we are not allow'd to forbear the Execution.

The greatest part of the *Romish* Casuists, not excepting those who are least severe, together with *Grotius*, and the Authors of our Commu-

Communion, agree that these Oaths are truly Obligatory; and they ground their Judgment on the following Reasons.

I. When we swear, we do not only promise to the Robber, but we promise to God himself; and therefore how unworthy soever the former is of receiving what we promis'd, yet we are bound in Justice to keep our Promise to God, and nothing is more reasonable than that we should thus Honour and Reverence his Holy Name, which we applied to confirm our Engagement.

II. In other Cases, we are bound to keep a Promise which is neither unjust nor impossible: And here, we may give the Robber what we promis'd him, nor is there any Law, Divine or Humane, which forbids us. How then can we dispense with our selves for the Performance, after we are engag'd to it by the most Sacred of all Ties, as an Oath unquestionably is?

III. When we made such a Promise, we did what we then believ'd we ought to do, and what we would do again, if reduced to the same Circumstances: And therefore, how can we honestly depart from a Resolution, into which we enter'd upon so prudent and so judicious Motives?

IV. Every Conditional Promise ought to be fulfill'd, when the Condition is once perform'd: And why should not we be bound to execute our Promise in this case, since the Condition is past, and was effectually made good?

V. The Wisdom of the Flesh ought always to be suspected. And is it not the effect of this  
Carnal



Carnal Wisdom, if we prefer a vile Interest to so holy an Engagement, as we have here enter'd into ?

VI. The Heathens themselves were of this Persuasion ; and every one knows what high Encomiums and Elogies the *Romans* have bestow'd on *Regulus*, who expos'd himself to the most cruel Tortures, rather than he would violate the Promise he had made to the *Carthaginians*, of returning and surrendring himself into their Hands.

VII. I would ask in the last place, Whether the Party utter'd this Oath with a design to keep it ? Or, whether he resolv'd from the Beginning not to perform it ? If the Latter, this was formal Perjury, and a direct mockery of God : If the Former, that is, if the Party design'd to execute this Promise, notwithstanding the Force which induced him to make it ; 'tis evident, That this Force which he suffer'd cannot alter the Engagement which he laid on himself. His Promise took effect, and was not hinder'd by that Force, and that Injury, of which he was very sensible when he past it.

'Tis agreed, That a Contract upon Force becomes good and valid, if afterwards Rati-fied by free Consent : And why may not the same happen in the Case before us ? He that Promises, exerts two Acts, his outward Declaration, and the inward Assent of his Mind. The First I grant is forced, but the Second is free. Why should not this free Consent, when join'd to a Promise upon Force, have the same Efficacy, as if given at some distance of Time ?

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But a Robber, say some, is a publick Enemy, who ought not to be allow'd the common Advantages of Society. I confess it : But then our Obligation to keep our Promise does not arise from Civil Society, but is founded on a different bottom : It is founded upon the Law of Nature ; and this Law obliges us to perform what we have promis'd, to whomsoever the Promise was made.

It is said farther, That a Robber has no Right to that which he demands of us. This is very true : But 'tis not in virtue of any Right which he can have, that we assert the Obligation of paying what was promis'd him ; It is in virtue of what we owe to God, and of what we owe to our selves.

It will perhaps be still askt, Why Error should invalidate an Oath, and yet Fear should not produce the like Effect ? The reason of this Difference may be easily assign'd. Error, such at least such as we now speak of, absolutely destroys the Liberty of the Will : Fear on the other side leaves it still in being. The Action which proceeds from the latter Principle is always voluntary, tho' not perfectly so. For the Proof of this, ought we not rather to suffer Death, than to promise an unjust thing, if the Robber should demand it of us ? It's plain therefore, that we are free to Promise, or not to Promise ; so that here the Oath is firm and valid, which it is not, in case it proceeds from an invincible and involuntary Mistake.

Lastly, It will be objected, That this Determination is contrary to two others which I have given in the preceding Chapters : In  
one



one of them I have affirm'd, That an Oath added to a Contract does not change the Nature of it ; and that if the Contract be null, the Oath does not make it binding. I have said in another of them, That a bare Contract is absolutely void, if forced and extorted by Fear. If these Principles are true, it should seem that the Promise we are now speaking of is not obligatory, because the Agreement which we have made with the Robber, being always upon Force, is necessarily void ; and being in it self void, the Addition of the Oath cannot render it valid.

But not to repeat what was before observed, concerning our Design and Intention of doing what we promis'd, and concerning the Power which this Design may have, to correct what was vitious and defective in the Promise it self : Besides this, I say, 'tis easy to reply, That in the Case now under Debate, there are two different Contracts, one which we make with the Robber, and another which we make with God Almighty : The first is void, notwithstanding the Additional Oath : But the Second is in Force and Vigour. 'Tis not in virtue of the former that we are bound to execute what we promis'd ; 'tis purely in virtue of the Latter. If we fail in the Performance, the Robber will have no Right to complain, but God has Right to punish.

There is another Case very much resembling the Former. The Robber forces the Party whose Life he spares, to swear that he will not discover him to the Magistrate : Is



the Party bound to observe this Oath, or ought he rather to break it ?

The Decision of this Point turns wholly on one Consideration ; Whether it was lawful to make such an Oath, or not ? If 'twas lawful to make it, 'tis certainly lawful to keep it : But if it were unlawfully made, it cannot be lawfully kept.

Can we say, therefore, That a Man who has no other vway of preserving his Life, but by obliging himself not to discover him vvho threatens to take it from him, ought rather to sacrifice it, than to svvear in this manner, and to do vvhat he has svvorn ? This vvould be too strict and rigorous a Doctrine ; and I question very much, vvwhether vve should find any one that vvould act up to it, vvhen put on the Trial.

It's said, That such an Oath is contrary to the Good of the Publick ; vvwhich requires, That Thieves should be punish'd, and, by Consequence, should be discover'd. Let it be so ; yet, are vve alvvays bound to procure the Good of the Publick, in every kind and degree, at the Expence of our own Life ? Without doubt vve are bound to do so, in case the Publick vvould othervvise be ruin'd : But since this Calamity cannot be apprehended from our Concealment of the Robber, nay, since there is not the least Proof that our Silence vvill cause the Death of any one Person ; I do not think vve ought rather to Die our selves, than to contract such an Obligation of Secrecy.

This appears to me the more certain, because, as Bishop *Sanderfon* vvith great Judgment

ment observes, a Person under these Circumstances exposes the Publick to the same Danger by losing his Life, as he would by holding his Tongue; for after he had been Murder'd, the Publick would be as much at a loss to know and apprehend the Author of the Fact, as if he had escaped without giving the least Notice or Intimation of what had happen'd.

It must therefore be allow'd for Truth, That a Man is not bound to give up his Life, rather than promise not to discover him who threatens to take it: And if he is permitted to make such a Promise, even with the Confirmation of an Oath, who can doubt but that he's oblig'd to observe it? For can it enter into any Man's Thought, that he may lawfully omit what he swore to do? Every lawful Oath obliges, and we are releas'd from none but such as are unlawful and criminal: Nay, there are many which, tho' unlawful, yet do not cease to be obligatory, as we have shovvn upon another Occasion.

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## C H A P. XIX.

### *A Reply to some other Questions.*

There are some other Questions which are wont to be put in relation to this Subject; and such as will easily receive an Answer. In the first place 'tis askt, Whether the Oath of the Father obliges the Child

at least in case of the Child's succeeding to the Father's Inheritance.

To which Bishop *Sanderfon* replies, that indeed the Charges and Burthens of the Contract, pass from the Person contracting to his Heirs; but that the Obligation arising from the Oath is altogether Personal, and dies with him that swore. Whence he concludes, that if the Heir shall act contrary to such an Oath, he will be guilty of Injustice, but not of Perjury.

I fear, this Answer is a little too subtle; and I am mistaken, if the contrary does not appear from the Example of *Saul*. This Prince had not sworn to preserve the *Gibeonites* alive: The Oath was *Joshua's*; yet *Saul* was punish'd for the violation of it: Wherefore, I think, that the Oaths of Parents, and in general, of all Predecessors, may oblige their Children, and Successors.

At least, this will not be disputed, in case the Party who made the Oath expressly declar'd, that it should bind his Heirs, as well as himself: For then whosoever assumes the Character of his Heir, enters into all the Engagements of the Deceas'd, no less effectually than if they had been of his own making.

II. Here's another Case, which seems more difficult to be decided. An expert Physician has found out an infallible Remedy for some Distemper hitherto reputed incurable. He will not divulge this Secret, that he may not rob himself of the Profits arising from it, but he sells it to another Person, taking an Oath of him, not to discover it during



during the Life of the Inventor ; yet by the discovery of it, this other Person might save the Lives of a multitude of Men ; Ought he therefore, to disclose it, on account of so great an Advantage to the Publick, or ought he to conceal it, in regard to his Oath ?

I demur not upon the Point ; I am satisfied, that he ought to adhere to his Oath : For first, It is only Charity that can induce him to reveal the Secret, whereas Justice obliges him to keep it private ; it being *Just*, according to the Propriety of the Word, to stand to our Agreements, or Covenants. But now, 'tis certain, that Justice is of a far more strong and pressing Nature than Charity, and that when these Duties happen to interfere, we are bound to give the preference to the former.

Besides, what I said upon another Question, may be applied to that which is now before us : The Party is oblig'd to keep his Oath, if he was allow'd to make it. And who can doubt, but that this Oath was innocent and lawful ? No, say some, it hinders him from declaring what the Publick is concern'd to know. I answer, there's nothing of this in the Case. The Publick would have been alike ignorant of the Secret, if he had never sworn ; for then he himself must have remained a stranger to it, the Inventor refusing to impart it on any other Terms : So that the Oath having made no manner of alteration as to the Interest, or the Condition of the Publick, was certainly Innocent, and if Innocent, it must be Obligatory.

III. It is ask'd again, What course a Person shall take, who has oblig'd himself by Oath never to accept of an Employment, whether Civil or Ecclesiastical, and yet finds himself under such Circumstances, that he judges 'tis for the Publick Good he should recede from his Oath, as may happen upon default of other Persons qualified for such Employments?

This Question created much uneasiness to the Primitive Church; *St. Athanasius* was of Opinion that such an Oath did not oblige, he endeavour'd (and that with success) to perswade *Draconces*, who had sworn never to be a Bishop. *St. Basil* has given a contrary Determination, in his famous Epistle to *Amphilochus*. *Palladius* very severely censures *Arsacius*, *St. Chrysostom's* Successor, for having accepted the Bishoprick of *Constantinople*, after such a Self-denying Oath. And every one knows what Contests and Dissensions troubled all the West, on the account of Pope *Formosus*, who was in the same Case.

In my Judgment, the whole Matter depends on this Consideration only, Whether it was really thus for the Publick Good that the Party should accept of the Charge. For if it were so, and if the Party had Reason to believe that the Honour of God, and the Interest of the Publick, demanded his Compliance, I doubt not but he ought to quit his Engagement to the contrary: My reason is, because such an Engagement could not be innocent: The Matter of the Oath was evil; for the Person was really bound to do all that  
lay

lay in his Power, towards the advancing God's Glory, and the Publick Good; He engag'd himself not to do it; he therefore, engag'd himself to a Sin, at least a Sin of Omission. So that, on the whole, the Oath was unlawful, and, by consequence, invalid.

'Tis quite otherwise, if only private Interest, or Ambition, or Vanity, or any the like Motive, induced the Party to seek, or barely to accept such an Office. In this case, he did ill, to make the Oath, but he does worse if he breaks it.

IV. It is farther ask'd, What we are to think of those Oaths by which we oblige our selves to do things indifferent in their own Nature, but such as expose us to great Temptations, and, consequently, to great danger of offending God?

The Answer seems to be very easie: If by taking the utmost care and pains, and by using all the means of which we are capable, we may overcome these Temptations, and avoid these Dangers, then the Oath certainly holds good, and in order to the performance of it, we are bound to take these pains, and to use these Endeavours. But if the Danger be inevitable, so that all the Means we could apply would be insufficient to secure us from it, 'tis evident that in this case the Oath does not oblige; because being never bound to Sin, we can never be bound to do that which cannot be done without Sinning.

V. Lastly, it is ask'd, Whether an Oath which was good and valid when utter'd, may cease to oblige some time after.

This



This admits of no difficulty: The Case propos'd may happen several ways. First, It may so happen, that what we oblige our selves to do shall change its Nature, and having been originally possible and innocent, shall in time become impossible, or unlawful, which we may easily suppose, and which, indeed, we every Day experience. Here we are not to doubt but that the Oath loses its whole Power of obliging.

The Law of God farther teaches us, that when Inferiors, or Persons under Subjection, engage themselves to do, or not to do, any thing, their Superiors may reverse and cancel the Engagement; and thus it determines that a Father, or Husband, may disannul the Vow of a Daughter or Wife. Yet as to this Instance, we might, perhaps, affirm, that here neither the Father, nor the Husband, does properly, and strictly speaking, evacuate the Oath, or Vow, of the Parties under their Power: For, indeed, either this Oath, and this Vow was absolute, and such as the Wife, or the Daughter, pretend to engage themselves by, independently from the Husband's and the Father's Will; or else they made this tacit reserve, that the thing should hold good, provided their respective Superiors afterwards consented to it. If the first, the Vow and the Oath are manifestly void from the Moment in which they were made; because they relate to things of which the Parties had no Right to dispose. If the second, then it is not the Husband, or the Father, that cancels the said Oath or Vow: They only shew that

that the Condition which the Party supposed is wanting, and, consequently, that no Vow, or Oath, was truly and properly made. But 'tis not very material to enquire how this is perform'd, since we are sure of the thing in general.

If an Oath be barely promissory, and such by which we engage our selves to do somewhat for the Profit, or Pleasure of another Person, 'tis evident that if he releases us, the Oath can no longer oblige us.

To Conclude; in reciprocal, or mutual Engagements, when one of the Parties recedes from his Promise, the other is not bound by his Oath; because indeed the Oath was Conditional, and obliged to nothing, unless the Promise should be perform'd. So that, upon non-performance, the Condition is taken away, and, by consequence the Oath which was founded upon it cannot subsist.

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## C H A P. XX.

### *Of Restitution.*

ONE of the principal Engagements into which we enter by our Actions, is that of Restitution. Indeed, when we cause any unjust prejudice to our Neighbour, or by any means whatsoever hinder him from enjoying his own, we are indispensably oblig'd to repair the Injury which we have done him, and cannot fail in this respect, without

without wounding our Conscience. This is what I have clearly evinc'd in my *Abridgement of Morality*. I have there produc'd the chief Authorities of Scripture which enjoin this Duty, and have particularly shewn, that he who refuses the Practice of it, demonstrates himself to be void of true and sincere Repentance. Not to repeat what I have offer'd in that Work, I shall here content my self with adding some Reflections which seem of very necessary importance.

Restitution, properly and strictly speaking, consists only in putting our Neighbour again into actual Possession of what belong'd to him, and what we kept him from enjoying. I say in the first place, *of what belong'd to him*; for if he had no Right to that which we give him, we cannot be truly said to make Restitution. Nay it must belong to him in the most direct manner, by the Right of Dominion, or Property: For if he can pretend to it by no Title but what Charity supplies him with, there's no Restitution in the Case: For Example, I am able to relieve a poor Man that asks an Alms: I withhold my Relief; in this I sin against Charity, but not against Justice; and by consequence I am not oblig'd afterwards to make good to this poor Man what I ought at first to have given him.

Again, this Justice must be such as we style *Commutative*, and such as creates a true and proper Right. For in the violation of *Distributive* Justice only, the Doctors hold Restitution not to be necessary; but then it ought to be observ'd, that we may happen



to offend against both these Species of Justice at once; because the Persons to whom the Distribution is to be made, may have a very particular Right to it. We are intrusted, for instance, with the division of a Sum of Money amongst the Poor; but are expressly enjoyn'd to prefer the Poor of such an Order, or Character, to those of another. 'Tis manifest, that if we act otherwise, and bestow the Money upon all sorts of Poor, without distinction, we Sin against *Commutative* Justice, and are bound to restore to the Poor of that Order which should have had the preference, whatever we gave away from them to others.

The same thing may happen after a different manner. We may happen not to Sin against *Commutative* Justice in respect of those to whom we refuse what we give to others, and at the same time may violate it in respect of a third Person: For Example, a Prince confides in me for the choice of fit Persons to be put into Employments Ecclesiastical, Civil, or Military: I am bound no doubt, to prefer the most Worthy. If I fail in this, I sin against *Commutative* Justice, not with regard to the Persons whom I deprive of these Offices, but with regard to the Publick, the Honour and Interest of which was thus far committed to my Charge.

I observ'd in the second place, that e'er we can be bound to make Restitution, we must hinder, or have hinder'd, the Party to whom it is made, from enjoying that which we now restore to him. For if he was hindered by a third Person, we may give him  
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our utmost assistance in order to the Recovery; but we are not properly concern'd in the Act of restoring.

Now there are two ways by which we may hinder our Neighbour from enjoying his own. First, by taking it unlawfully from him; secondly, by detaining it, tho' we did not take it. For, indeed, if I unjustly withhold what I have given, what I have found, what has been lent me, or what has been put into my Custody, I am no less oblig'd to deliver it, than if I had actually wrested it from the lawful Owner.

It highly imports us to know on which of these Titles the Obligation we are under of making Restitution is founded. For if it arise from the former, that is, from an Act of Injustice, by which we robbed and spoil'd our Neighbour of what belong'd to him, we are bound to repair his Loss, whether the thing which we took from him is still in being or not: Nay, we are bound to restore not only what we took, but whatever he could have gained, or profited by it in the mean time. Whereas, on the contrary, if this Obligation arise from the latter Title, it may happen that we shall be bound only to restore the very Thing it self, or it may happen that we shall not be bound to deliver even that, because it may have been lost, in the mean while, without our Fault.

I say that *it may happen*, and not that 'tis so necessarily, or in all Instances; for there are Cases in which we are oblig'd to make good what we have lost, tho' we have omitted nothing in order to its preservation; as  
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in Loans for Example : 'Tis always our Duty to return or repay what we have borrow'd, whether the Numerical thing be still in our Possession, or whether we have lost it, or by what means soever it disappears : But 'tis otherwise for the most part ; and if the thing be missing without our fault, this is commonly enough to release us from the Obligation of making it good.

There is a particular Difficulty in relation to things *found*. 'Tis agreed, that what has no Proprietor belongs to the first Taker : And upon this is grounded the Liberty of Hunting, or Fishing in Places where the Laws of the Land do not forbid it. 'Tis farther agreed, That he who finds a thing, and knowvs vvho vvvas the Person that lost it, is bound to return it to him : And St. *Augustin* says, it is Robbery to do othervvise. Lastly, 'tis agreed, That he vvho finds a thing, and knowvs not by vvhom it vvvas lost, is bound to inform himself vvith all possible Care, and even to make publick Proclamation, if he has no other means of discovering the Ovvner.

All this is evident, and admits of no Dispute : But 'tis not so easy to know, how we ought to proceed, when having made the most honest and strict Enquiry, we still remain Ignorant, as to the true Owner of what is fallen into our Hands. The Question here is, Whether we may be allow'd to keep it, or whether we are not oblig'd to bestow it on the Poor.

The greatest part of the Casuists, and even those who are commonly more mild and yielding



yielding than others, maintain that we ought to give it to the Poor, and pretend, that we cannot keep it without Sin. But I do not see that they alledge any solid Proof for this Determination : And indeed, if what they said were true, the Duty must arise either from the Law of Nature, or from Positive Laws. As for Positive Laws, they cite none ; nor indeed is there any of this kind, which extends to *Christians* in general. And as for the Law of Nature, I do not apprehend what Right this can give the Poor, to such Goods as did not belong to them before they were lost.

In my Judgment, 'tis with these Goods as with those which have not yet been appropriated, and which by the Law of Nations, (perhaps also by the Law of Nature) belong to the first Occupant. Again, 'tis with them as with Goods voluntarily abandon'd and relinquish'd ; to which all agree, that the Poor have no juster Title than the Wealthy. And therefore I cannot believe, that he who keeps such Goods is guilty of a breach of Justice, provided he be always ready to deliver them, in case the lawful Owner shall appear.

*M. D.* is not satisfied with this Decision. He will have the Goods to belong to the Prince or the State : But I do not remember that I have ever read any one Casuist who was of the same Mind. It seems to me, that we may assure our selves of the contrary, upon this Reason, that such as make it their Business to rail against the higher Powers, never accuse them of neglecting their Rights, or of taking

taking less than their due from the Subject : And yet we don't find that Sovereigns exercise any Property over such Goods. Whence we may conclude, That they do not pretend to any : Nay, we may affirm, That if they had such a Right, they must be supposed to have renounced it, by forbearing to put in their Claim.

Besides, they who ascribe such a Right to Princes over things of this kind, ought precisely to determine the Foundation and Origin of it. They ought to tell us, Whether it proceeds from the Law of Nature, or from some Positive Law Divine or Humane. Should they attempt this, no doubt they would meet with such Difficulties, as would cost them much trouble to assail.

I confess, it appears to me a little ridiculous, that as often as we take up a Farthing in the Street, we should be bound to run and throw it into the Publick Treasury.

Lastly, this Method would be highly inconvenient for the true Owners, in case they should afterwards be discover'd ; for we are all sensible how difficult it is to recover any thing, tho' of the smallest Value, out of the common Bank. I am convinc'd therefore, that the best way is to adhere to my former Position.

## C H A P. XXI.

*An Answer to certain Queries, concerning  
Restitution.*

**T**Here are several Queries which offer themselves to our Examination on this Subject. First it is askt, Who those Persons are that are bound to make Restitution? To which 'tis easily replied, That, in the first place, they are all those who possess another's Goods without the Owner's Consent: Such are obliged to restore the Goods, after what manner, or by what way soever they came into their Hands.

They are, in the Second place, all those who have depriv'd their Neighbour of what belong'd rightfully to him; whether they have enrich'd and advantag'd themselves by the Injury, or not? Whether they are in Possession of the thing, or have lost it: Whether they actually took it from their Neighbour, or only concurred in defeating him of it: In a Word, Whether they contributed to his Suffering, directly or indirectly, sinfully or innocently. None of these Circumstances can alter the Necessity of Restitution; because 'tis unjust in any kind, and after any manner, to deprive our Neighbour of his Right.

We may give an Example of this, which is beyond Dispute, and yet which is little consider'd in the World. An Adulteress brings illegitimate Children into her Husband's



band's Family, who afterwards become his Heirs, and very often Coheirs with his lawful Issue. No doubt, in this Case, which too frequently happens, both the Adulterer, and the Adulteress, are bound to repay to the Husband all the Charges he has been at, in maintaining and educating their spurious Brood, and to the legitimate Children, or the Husband's next Relations and Heirs presumptive, whatever they have been endamag'd on this Account. 'Tis most certain, that they ought to do so, and I never saw it contested. There are only some Difficulties as to the Execution: Yet these Difficulties are rarely insuperable to such as have a true and sincere Desire of performing all that's necessary to secure their Eternal Welfare:

The Persons obliged to make Restitution are, in the third place, those who by their Neglect, have suffer'd another to lose what 'twas their Duty to have defended and preserv'd for him. Thus Guardians are bound to make good to their Wards whatever has been taken from them through their Default: Such as manage the Affairs of Publick Bodies or Communities, lie under the same Engagements; which I likewise extend to Bailiffs, Stewards, and other Domesticks, who neglect the Interest of their Masters.

Fourthly, and lastly, The Necessity of Restitution devolves on the Heirs of all those Persons who stood before oblig'd: For indeed, they possess what is not in any respect their own; and what, on the contrary, belongs to some third Person, whom they debar from the Enjoyment of it. They are

bound, therefore, to deliver it to him, and they sin against Justice if they detain it. We need only observe, That they are bound to make such Restitution solely out of the Goods or the Inheritance receiv'd ; for it cannot be pretended, that they ought to apply to this use the Goods which they have acquir'd by their own Industry, or which came to them from other Hands.

We may proceed to the Second Query ; What it is that ought to be restor'd ? To which we readily Answer : First, Whatever the Party has in his Possession, that of Right belongs to his Neighbour. Secondly, Whatever he has taken from him, or caus'd him to lose, whether he possesses it, or not. Thirdly, He is bound to repair all Damages that his Neighbour has since suffer'd, by his Act of Injustice. Thus much is evident beyond all Dispute.

We ought not to imagine, That those Goods alone are to be restor'd, which we usually term the Goods of Fortune. There are many others, in respect of which Restitution is no less necessary : Such, for Example, is Reputation : This is *taken away*, or however we please to express it, is *ruin'd*, by Slander and Calumny. Persons who are guilty of such Injustice, are no doubt oblig'd to repair it, by giving Testimony to the Truth, and by retracting whatever they have utter'd to their Neighbour's Prejudice.

There are certain Injuries which blemish and dishonour the Sufferers : Nay, there are several Species which agree in this Effect : In what manner soever these are committed,  
or

or to what Order soever they belong, the Injurious Person cannot hope to obtain the Mercy and Pardon of God, unless he make Reparation, to the utmost of his Ability, whatever Method is to be used for that purpose.

This Obligation of restoring to our Neighbour what we have unjustly depriv'd him of, extends even to Spiritual Goods. We are bound to disabuse and undeceive those whom we have seduced, to make them see the Falseness, and the Poyson of those Errors which we instill'd into them. We ought to use our best Endeavours towards the Recovery of those, who have fallen into Sin by our bad Example. We ought to omit nothing, in order to the Reconciling of those whom we have set at Variance, by false Reports, or by evil Counsel. In a Word, we are bound to do all that we can, for the bringing back again to their Duty, those whom in any way, or by any means whatsoever, we have diverted from it.

Some things there are, which being once taken away, cannot be given again; and yet do not remit, or dispense with the Necessity of Restitution. Thus we may have cut off a Man's Hands, with which he earn'd his Livelihood. We may have kill'd another, whose Children depended wholly on his Labour and Industry for their Subsistence: We cannot give Hands to the First, nor Life to the Second: But this does by no means release us. We are bound to make good to the Person who was maim'd, and to the Children of him that was kill'd, whatever the one or the



other could have gain'd for himself, or for his Family.

*Numb. v.* The Third Query is, to whom Restitution ought to be made. This Point is exactly settled by the Law of God, which commands us to restore the Goods, in the first place, to the Owner; and if he be deceas'd, to his Heirs; and if he have no Heirs, to God, by disposing of them to Pious Uses.

And this last Method we ought to take, when we do not precisely know whom we have injur'd, as in many cases it may happen. Here we are bound to bestow in Alms, and other Works of Piety, what we cannot restore to the Owners: But this we are not permitted to do, upon any other Occasion; for nothing indeed is more unjust, than the Practice of those who being very well ascertain'd of the Parties whom they have wrong'd, imagine, that they may expiate their Crime, by giving to the Poor what they should return to the lawful Proprietor: Such Men deal with God Almighty, says St. *Austin*, as Thieves with a Wicked Judge; and endeavour to corrupt Him, by making Him a Sharer in the Booty: But this proceeding is so far from pleasing God, that we may say it doubly provokes Him, in that it not only lets the first Sin remain, but adds a Second, by the Affront and Indignity of supposing that He is to be pleas'd in this manner.

It is farther askt, at what time we ought to make Restitution? And 'tis easy to reply, So soon as we perceive the Injustice we have done, and are in a Condition to repair it:

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We ought not to lose one Moment ; nor can we make too much haste to rescue our selves out of so deplorable a State as this Sin has cast us into. 'Tis impossible we should labour with too much Ardor and Celerity, to discharge a Duty which is so necessary and indispensable, and which alone can shelter us from the Divine Wrath and Vengeance : And so much the rather, because if we defer the Execution at present, we expose our selves to the Danger of never performing it, and by Consequence of losing our selves for ever. New Obstacles and Impediments may daily arise. We may harden our Conscience, and render it insensible of all Uneasiness and Disquiet : So that our best Course is immediately to resolve, and to execute our Resolution the very next Moment after we have made it.

But to give a full view of this Matter, we must observe, that the unjust detaining of another's Goods, is one of those fixt and permanent Sins which we stile Habitual, and which have a formal and invincible Opposition to the Character of a *Christian* and a *Child of God*. Nor is this all ; such a Sin of Habit is attended with a great number of Actual Sins, into which it frequently betrays us : For indeed, whenever we have an Opportunity of restoring what we unjustly got, and refuse or neglect to do it, we become guilty of a new Sin of Omission. Nay, it may be said, that we continually Sin, because we continually with-hold what we wrongfully acquir'd : And accordingly, all Divines maintain, that unjust Detention is

at once a Sin of Omission, and a Sin of Commission, as it violates two Commands, the one Affirmative, and the other Negative. The Affirmative enjoins us to give every Man what belongs to him. The Negative forbids us to keep what does not belong to our selves. *Owe no Man any thing*, says St. Paul in this Sense. Now the unjust Detainer often transgresses the first of these Commands, and always the Second. As in General, Affirmative Precepts oblige only upon Occasions, but Negative Precepts at all times. Thus the Party never ceases to Sin, because, indeed, he never restores.

We may hence discover, What Opinions we ought to have of two sorts of Persons. The first are those, who being conscious of Injustice done to their Brethren, and sensible that they ought to repair it, do yet persist, not only without the Act, but without any Thought or Intention of Performance. The Second are those, who having some Design to this purpose, put off the Execution from Day to Day; either as hoping to acquit themselves of the Duty with more convenience hereafter, or as desiring to enjoy as long as possible the Fruits of their Injustice.

As well the one as the other sort of these Men evidently demonstrate, that all the time during which they continue under such a Disposition, they have not the least Piety, the least Motion of the Fear of God in their Heart, the least Charity or Justice; that they entertain no manner of Thought or  
Care



Care of their own Salvation, and that the principal Object of their Affections and Desires, is not God or Heaven, but Earth and its vile Interests. In a Word, 'tis difficult to conceive a State more sad and deplorable, or more opposite to true Holiness.

Let such Men consider seriously their Case; let them examine which is most important to them, to detain what they unjustly possess, or to let go their own Salvation? Let them reflect whether it is not infinitely less disadvantageous, presently to disburthen themselves of that which Death, however, will not suffer them long to keep, than to rob themselves of the Happiness of Heaven, and willfully incur the Pains of a miserable Eternity.

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## C H A P. XXII.

*What things dispense with the necessity of  
Restitution.*

**T**H O' the Necessity of Restitution be exceedingly great and pressing, yet 'tis possible there may be such Occasions as in some sort dispense with it. As in the first place, when a Man is reduc'd to an utter impossibility of performing this Duty, either in whole or in part. For it is not to be conceived, that he who finds himself in such a Condition, and who otherwise demonstrates a lively Faith and a sincere Repentance, should be excluded from Heaven, for  
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this Reason only, because he is unable to repair the Wrong of which he has been the Author. This is not consistent with the Promises of God, so often repeated in his Holy Word, engaging him to afford his Grace to all those who shall truly repent, and unfeignedly believe in his Son.

There are only two things to be considered on this Subject. First, That the impossibility here spoken of, must be absolute, and that we cannot excuse our selves from the Duty by any pretence of not being able to perform it without inconvenience, or without incapacitating our selves to subsist hereafter in a way suitable to our Birth, and to our Rank and Figure in the World. These vain Imaginations are so far from being just and solid, as not to be even probable. The Necessity of Restitution is too strong to be vanquish'd by such Trifles. 'Tis the World which has introduc'd these Distinctions, and these Points of Decency and Honour; on the other hand, it is the Law of God, his eternal and immutable Law, which obliges us to repair the Evil we have done: And what can the World bring to over-balance the Foundation of this Duty?

The other thing here to be considered is, that in case we are unable to repair the whole Damage which we have occasioned, we must not fail to repair some part of it, how small or inconsiderable soever. There is ground to hope that God will assist and support those who cannot do all that they would: But *they* ought to look for no Favour who do not, in this respect, all that they can.

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II. If the Persons to whom Restitution ought to be made, voluntarily renounce their Right, and consent that we should keep what before we did not lawfully possess, no doubt we are excused from all Obligation of restoring it. But then 'tis requisite that this Consent should be absolutely free, and nothing is more unreasonable than the Fancy of those, who think their Conscience has nothing to charge them with, after they have once executed certain Compositions made with those whose Goods they retain, tho' perhaps, half forc'd. For unless the injur'd Party voluntarily consents, and if the least threat, or other sign of Compulsion be used, the Agreement is to no manner of purpose.

III. We are likewise excused from making Restitution, when they who might otherwise require it of us have done us the like Injury: For when this happens, there is a sort of Compensation between these two Acts of Injustice, or at least between the respective Obligations of satisfying for them.

Such a Case may certainly be admitted, but it must be under these four Conditions. First, We must have as good Assurance of the Wrong which we have suffered, as of that which we have done. For if the latter be manifest and incontestable, while the former is dubious, and perhaps false, there can be no room for Compensation, nor can our Suspicions on the one hand weigh against our Certainty on the other.



Secondly, Compensation can only take place between the same Parties. If he whom I have wrong'd, has also wrong'd me in his turn, I owe him no Reparation. But if my Charge lies only against a third Person, as I cannot complain of him, so I cannot excuse my self from restoring that of which I have unjustly deprived him.

In the third place, 'Tis evident that a Damage received can only compensate a Damage given to the same Value. Thus if a Man detains but half as much of mine, as I possess of his, no doubt I am bound to return him the other half.

Lastly, Tho' the Injustice we suffer may dispense with us for not repairing that which we have done, yet it cannot Authorize us to do any. I would say, the Wrong we have received from a certain Person may very well exempt us from the Obligation of restoring to him what we unjustly detained before; but it gives us no manner of Right to take and seize by our own private Authority, and by way of Execution, what we think belongs to us, and is now in his Hands. At our first entrance into Civil Society, we gave up all our Power of this righting our selves. We are oblig'd, therefore, to apply to the Magistrate on these Occasions, and are notoriously unjust if we make use of any other Method.

## C H A P. XXIII.

*What regard we ought to have to the Consciences of other Men.*

THESE are the chief Rules and Measures of Conscience; to which we may add one more, I mean the Conscience of our Neighbour, which in some Cases certainly binds our own: Not because our Neighbours Conscience has any sort of Authority over ours, but because we ought to avoid all occasions of wounding, or of ensnaring his; And this may happen two ways.

First, when by doing an Action, in it self lawful, we offend our weak Brethren, and either mislead them from the Truth, or put them into some other danger of miscarrying. For here, this Infirmary of our Neighbour, and this Danger to which we expose him by an improper use of our own Liberty, oblige us to abstain from that in which we might otherwise be allowed. This is a Truth which *St. Paul* has most strongly evinced and establish'd in several places, particularly in the XIVth Chapter of his Epistle to the *Romans*. But there are several Reflections to be made on this Subject, and we may easily exceed, or be deficient in the Duty enjoyn'd. I have spoken largely to it, in the first Volume of my *Moral Essay*, when I treated of *Christian Condescension*; and having nothing to add to what I there observ'd, I shall dismiss the Consideration of it at present.

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The second way by which we may fall short of what we owe to the Conscience of our Neighbour is, when by our Solicitation, or any other effectual Means, we prevail with him to do that which his Conscience condemns, whether justly or not.

I have heard of some Persons, who thinking it to be for their Interest, that a certain Falsity should pass with Credit; and not being able to procure it this Credit but by an Oath, have very rightly concluded, that they ought not swear themselves, yet by a most deplorable Error, have fancied that they might be allow'd to find another who should swear for them.

This Persuasion is intollerable and detestable; and in my Judgment, he who thus engages another Person to take a false Oath, sins much more heinously than if he had taken it himself. My Reason is, because, first, he is justly chargeable with the formal Guilt of the Oath; in as much as what we do by another, the Law supposes us to do by our selves; and then, to the heinousness of this Sin, he adds that of another Sin against Charity, the Laws of which he could not violate in a more direct and notorious manner, than by causing so irreparable a Damage to his Neighbour, while he prompts him to commit a Crime of the deepest Dye, and which perhaps may be the chief Occasion of his mis-carrying for ever.

There are few Casuists less severe than *Sanches*; and yet he not only condemns the Irregularity we are now speaking of, but he goes farther, and maintains, That 'tis not  
Lawful



Lawful to oblige a Man to swear, when we know he will swear what is false, though we know he does it innocently, and according to his real Thoughts. He says, that if the Party who requires the Oath be assured that the Matter of it is false, this is enough to disable him from so requiring it.

This Decision seems to me very judicious. He that requires the Oath in the present Case, makes use of it to procure Credit to a Falsity : Therefore, he not only deceives, but he abuses the Sacred Name of God, by making it a Cover for his Deceit : So that, if he does not swear falsely, yet his Action contains whatever is sinful or criminal, in a false Oath.

But 'tis askt, Whether a Pleader, who has no Evidence on his side, may offer an Oath to the other Party, tho' he presumes that he will not stick to forswear himself. *Sanchez*, whom I cited but now, and many others of his Fraternity, assert this to be allowable ; and the chief Foundation on which they proceed is, that to offer such an Oath has nothing in it of Injustice ; which indeed must be granted them.

But St. *Austin* is of another Opinion ; and indeed, altho' this Action has nothing in it contrary to Justice, yet it is formally opposite on the one side, to that Charity which we owe to this miserable Person, and on the other to our Love of God, and to that Zeal which we ought to have for the Observation of his Law : For is it not true, that Charity obliges us to do all that lyes in our Power, to hinder our Neighbour from bringing on  
himself

himself so great a Mischief as is inseparable from the Nature of a false Oath? And is it not as true, that our Love of God obliges us to prevent any such Affront or Indignity from being offer'd to him?

*Sanches* does not think of this second Objection: But he replies to the first, That Charity does indeed oblige us not to offer such an Oath, when we have no Interest in the discovery of the Truth; but he maintains, that it does not oblige us to sacrifice the least, or most inconsiderable Interest of our own, to the Salvation of our Neighbour: This shews, in a Word, that the Jesuite is very far distant from the Sentiments of St. *John*, who would have us ready to part with, and lose, not only our Goods, but even our Lives for our Brethren; *Hereby perceive we the Love of God, because he laid down his Life for us; and we ought to lay down our Lives for the Brethren.*

1 *John* ii.  
16.

If we are bound to employ our Goods and Estates in relieving our Neighbours temporal Necessities; how can we be allow'd to spare them, by indangering his Eternal Welfare?

Wherefore, altho' it should be suppos'd, that our Neighbour's false Oath would be the means of procuring some great and considerable Advantage to us, yet we ought to renounce this Advantage, for the Prevention of his Sin: But with how much more readiness shall we do it, if we consider, that his Sin will really bring us no manner of Advantage, Spiritual or Temporal: For if he thus swear falsely, as we presume he will, the Dis-  
pute

pute is at an end, and we lose our Cause : How, therefore, can we be aiding and abetting to an Action, which may prove fatal to to him, and is wholly unprofitable to our selves.

Wherefore, we are not permitted to induce our Neighbour, directly or indirectly, to act against his Conscience, when it is Right, and judges of things according to Truth. Nor are we allow'd to do this, even when his Conscience is erroneous, and judges falsely, that the Action required is evil.

My Reason is, because (as I hope to demonstrate in the Sequel of this Attempt) even an erroneous Conscience obliges in such a manner, as that we cannot innocently perform what it condemns : So that by Consequence, to engage a Man to do what he thinks to be Evil, is to engage him to Sin ; and all such Endeavours must necessarily be Criminal.

Whence it appears, How high a Crime they are guilty of, who compel others to assist in the Offices of a Religion which they deny and detest. Suppose the Religion to be true at the bottom ; yet must it not be granted me, that they who think it false, and yet perform the outward Functions of it, commit a very grievous Sin ? And therefore, can any one doubt, but that they who constrain them to this Sin, render themselves highly culpable, and must one Day answer it to God ?

Upon which Principle, I could wish that such Protestants as have Popish Servants, would not command them, either to work



on a Festival of the Church of *Rome*, or to eat Flesh at the Seasons when the same Church forbids it by her Laws. I know these Laws are unjust: But however this be, no doubt they who esteem them just and reasonable, and at the same time violate them, cannot but Sin by such a Violation; and those who oblige them to it, after what manner soever, render themselves accountable for their Sin, and take the burthen of it on themselves, without disburthening or releasing the immediate Actors.

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## B O O K II.

## Of the Duties of CONSCIENCE.

## C H A P. I.

*The First Duty of Conscience, in respect of Actions to be done. It ought to give Judgment upon them all.*

**H**AVING laid down the principal Rules of *Conscience*, we are now to consider how it ought to use and apply them: And in order to this, we must enquire what are its Duties, which is the Subject of this Second Book.

There being two sorts of Actions of which the *Conscience* ought to judge and pronounce, Actions done, and Actions to be done: 'Tis easy to apprehend, that each of these two Objects engages it to a particular Set and Order of Duties. The three chief which it ought to observe, in judging of Actions to be done, are, First, to give Judgment upon every such Action. Secondly, to make a good Judgment: And Thirdly, to require a strict Obedience, after it has thus judg'd.

For, as to the First, we are not only faulty in judging ill of Actions, which present themselves to our Choice; but we likewise fail, if we judge not at all; and our

*Conscience* does not discharge it self of its Duty, nor answer the whole Design for which it was given us by God, if it keep silence, and forbear to explain it self on so pressing an Occasion: So that for the avoiding of this Default 'tis necessary, that before we undertake any Action which offers it self, we should carefully examine, whether it be Good, Evil or Indifferent.

The Reason is, because unless we make this Examination, we expose our selves to the greatest of all Dangers, which is that of sinning and displeasing God. Let us suppose the Action depending to be evil, as very possibly it may. Let us suppose, that we don't give our selves the trouble of enquiring about it: For want of such an Enquiry, 'tis possible we may not see what is Evil in it, and contrary to the Divine Will, and not seeing the Evil, we shall have nothing to hinder us from doing the Action, if there be otherwise any Motive of Pleasure or Interest which inclines us to it; whereas we should perhaps abstain from it, if we discern'd how far it was irregular and criminal, as we could not but discern, upon a diligent Scrutiny, and a thorough View.

Now that we shall rather be determined the former of these two ways, seems the more possible, in that there lies at the very Root of our Nature a secret bias and tendency to Evil. Scripture and Experience assure us beyond all doubt, that our Nature is depraved and corrupted; and that we have a strong Inclination either toward Sin in general, or at least towards many particular Species



cies of Sin. And, consequently, if we abandon our selves to this unhappy Disposition ; nay, if we do not take a very peculiar Care to oppose and resist it, we incur a manifest danger of every Moment offending God, and of drawing down upon our selves the Effects of his Wrath and Vengeance. But how can we effectually resist it, if we do not see what is thus sinful and pernicious in the Action to which it inclines us ? And how can we see this without due Attention and Regard ?

It will perhaps be said, That the Danger here is by no means so great as I pretend ; because indeed the Sins into which we fall after this manner, are not truly Sins, as not implying that prophane Contempt of the Divine Authority and Prohibition, which constitutes the very Essence of a sinful Action.

This Objection agrees very well with that Maxim of the *Jesuits*, which the Church of *Rome* has lately condemn'd under the famous Name of *Philosophical Sin* : For indeed, they who vented this abominable Doctrine, have told us, amongst other things, that a Sin committed through Inadvertency, cannot be a Sin in a Theological Sense ; that is, such a Sin as displeases God ; and deserves to be punish'd by Him. They say, That to render a Sin of this latter Complexion, 'tis necessary we should know that God has prohibited such an Action, and should even actually think of the particular Prohibition ; but if either we are wholly ignorant of it, or if knowing it, we do not reflect upon it at present, this will be a Sin only in a Philosophical Sense, or a Sin against Right Reason,

but such as is no way repugnant to that Obedience, and that Reverence which we owe to God.

But the extravagance of such a Position is most insupportable : In order to our committing Sin, and incurring the Penalty of it, there's no Necessity that we should actually think on the Divine Law by which it is forbidden. 'Tis enough, that we ought thus to have thought and consider'd : And if without such Consideration we venture on the Action, we render our selves truly culpable. Who indeed can suppose, but that we are bound to take this Method ? Even Men themselves, to whom we can owe so very little, will they be paid or satisfied with such Excuses ? Do not they require, that we should avoid giving them any Offence, whether thro' Inadvertency or otherwise ? Do not they resent the Affront whatever might be its Cause ? Do not they Censure those as Rash and Imprudent, who are often faulty in this respect ; and who being usually giddy and perplexed, run without thinking, upon Actions contrary to Civility, or to the other Duties of common Life ? Do not they expect that every one should take Care of what he does ? Why, therefore, should we not be engag'd to observe the same Rule, in our Christian Course ?

Whosoever prescribes a Duty, no doubt prescribes all necessary means of fulfilling it : And by Consequence, when God enjoins us not to Sin, he likewise enjoins us to avoid all Causes and Occasions of sinning : So that as nothing can more effectually lead us into Sin

Sin than want of Attention ; so 'tis certain, he condemns this Neglect, and commands that Watchfulness of Spirit which is opposite to it.

And this will be the more easily granted, if it be consider'd farther, That Inadvertency proceeds from such Principles as are rarely innocent. Sometimes it is owing to a certain Levity of Spirit, by which a Man is hurried on to Action, without knowing what he does, or why : A very evil Disposition is this, and directly opposite not only to Prudence, but to Piety.

But commonly it arises from hence, That we neither have any great desire to please God, nor any great fear of offending Him : For if we had either the one or the other, we should be more attentive than we are, to whatever might produce these two Effects. Upon all Occasions, and all sorts of Subjects, 'tis the Heart which moves the Understanding ; and every one may observe the Care and Precaution which any considerable Interest obliges us to apply. There's no Relation, how obscure or how distant soever, but we are able to perceive, if terminated in any darling Object of our Affections. A Covetous Man, for Example, will never do any thing thro' Inadvertency, that shall prejudice his Gain : So that if we truly loved God, and were truly afraid to displease him, we should guard against every thing which might have this fatal Consequence ; and therefore, this kind of Inadvertency is the Mark and Character of a Soul which is but little affected with the Love of God, and but



little in pain about the pleasing or serving Him.

It likewise proceeds often from the Force and Vehemence of some particular Passion : For we are struck in so violent a manner by the Object of this Passion, as to regard nothing but what is proper to excite, or to cherish it : And the Passions being almost always Criminal, 'tis manifest, that this Principle of Inadvertency cannot be innocent, nor by consequence the Inadvertency it self.

Lastly, it proceeds sometimes from an height of Prophaneness and Impiety, which having extinguish'd altogether, or at least for a time, the whole Light of Conscience, does so infatuate and stupify the Sinner, that instead of making it his great Business to please God, and to save his own Soul, he does not so much as think of this Sovereign Author and Disposer of all things, nor acts in such a manner as if he had heard the least mention of his Name or Being.

If what is pretended by the Patrons of *Philosophical Sin* were really true, it must follow, That neither these several Orders of Sinners which I have reckon'd up, nor these last in particular, who advance the Crime to its utmost Excess, were any longer guilty ; and that as the Neglect and Forgetfulness of God, under which they live, grew more absolute and entire, their Persons became proportionably more innocent, a Doctrine no less impious, than false and absurd.

'Tis certain therefore, That Inadvertency, or want of Consideration, is a wretched Plea, and a most untoward Apology : But  
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some will say, if it does not wholly take away the Guilt of an Action, can we deny, but that at least it diminishes and extenuates it? For who is not sensible, that 'tis worse beyond all Comparison to commit a Sin, knowing and seeing it to be so, than if we are either ignorant of its Irregularity, or do not actually reflect upon it at the present Moment? Upon this Principle it should seem, that we ought not to be exceeding careful in spying out whatever Viciousness may adhere to our Actions; because 'tis very possible, this Care may serve only to aggravate the Sins which we commit; which will infallibly come to pass, if notwithstanding such our Knowledge, we venture upon the Action, while the obliquity of it is thus evidently before our Eyes: And whereas without this diligence of search, it would have been no more than a Sin of Inadvertency, that is, a light and petty Offence, it will now be a Sin of pure Malice, that is, a Sin of the most heinous and aggravated Nature.

This Objection may seem plausible enough, but then 'tis no way solid: For, first, when I advise Men to consider what they do, 'tis not that they should persist in doing what they perceive to be evil and criminal: But, on the quite contrary, 'tis that they may abstain from it; as indeed, nothing is more proper to make them abstain, than this Watchfulness which I recommend.

I add, That if we were allow'd to neglect whatever might aggravate our Sin, it would be Lawful for us to neglect all means of Instruction, and to live in affected Ignorance; because

because indeed the knowledge of our Duty is one of those Circumstances which most enhance the Guilt and heinousness of our Sins. But since, notwithstanding this Consideration, it is of high Importance to us, to make every Day farther advances and improvements in the Knowledge of the Divine Will; 'tis plain that it cannot release us from the Duty of carefully attending to what we do, and of taking heed never to transgress the Bounds of Innocence.

Nay, it is certain that our Inadvertency, if procured by the formention'd Consideration, would be affected, and malicious, and therefore would be so far from extenuating, as highly to aggravate our Guilt. It would indeed have the same effect as Ignorance, which when we seek wilfully, by shutting our Eyes against the Truth, adds a new degree of sinfulness to the Actions which we commit under its Covert, instead of rendering them more worthy of Excuse.

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## C H A P. II.

*A Reply to an Objection. We ought to examine all the Degrees of Good or Evil, in every Performance.*

**T**Here may probably be some, who tho' they agree with me as to the main of what I have now deliver'd, yet will not acknowledge the Care and Diligence which I have recommended, to be of any great Necessity.



cessity. They will say, that Sin has something so frightful in its Nature, as commonly to rouse the Conscience, and (as it were) to give it an alarm by its Appearance: Whence they will conclude, that without applying our selves so strictly to watch what may be Evil in our Actions, we shall not fail to see it, nor even to be struck and excited by it.

But this Objection has no more Solidity than those before recited. For, as on the one side the Dispositions under which Men find themselves, with regard to Sin, are not the same in all Persons; so, on the other side, what is sinful in Actions, is not always alike sensible and apparent. There are indeed Good Consciences, which are affrighted at the very sight of what is Criminal: But there are likewise harden'd Consciences which nothing can move, or terrify. There are some Sins which carry their own horror and deformity in their Aspect; but then there are others, the irregularity of which is more obscure, and does not lie so open to our Discovery. And since those of the latter kind cannot be exempted from the Number of Sins, 'tis evident that they oblige us to use all manner of Precautions, lest we should be surpriz'd and overtaken by them.

Again, 'tis very possible that we may clearly and distinctly see an Action to be Evil, without seeing all the Evil that is in such an Action. It is very possible, that we may perceive but a small part of it; nay 'tis very rarely that it happens otherwise, or  
that

that we discover the whole irregularity of any Performance. In order to this, 'tis necessary we should be more quicksighted than the rest of the World commonly is: Yet it were to be wish'd, that we had a full View, and a perfect Understanding of every Action; because we might then the more easily abstain from such as are truly culpable.

Besides, there are few Persons equally disposed to commit all sorts of Crimes without difference or exception. Most Sinners have an abhorrence of some particular Enormities, which seem to them more heinous and more crying than others; and perhaps there are no Considerations, or at least but very few, that could tempt them to transgress in such a manner: Insomuch that he who, without Resistance, and almost without Scruple, commits a Sin which he esteems as light and trivial, will with great diligence avoid another which he looks upon as more grievous and provoking.

I own that this is very unreasonable, and that if we would be truly Good, we must abstain from all Sin, whether great, or little, in its appearance: Yet such a Temper, and such a Conduct, how unjust soever, are very frequent: Which being true in Fact, who can make any doubt but that Men every Day commit a multitude of Sins, which they would have forborn, had they been but thoroughly apprized of their inherent Evil.

I take it for granted, that there are but very few of those which we term evil, or sinful Actions, which will not be found much worse, and much more criminal than they seem

seem at first View. 'Tis not in one respect only that they may be Evil, but in many: They often prove so, in respect of God, of our Neighbour, and of our selves. With relation to God, they always lessen his Authority, and the Veneration which we owe him, in as much as he has condemn'd and forbidden them: But they may likewise be particularly affronting to some of his Perfections; as for Instance, to his Veracity, to his Wisdom, to his Power, or to his Goodness. They may cause several Prejudices to one or more, of our Neighbours; they may deprive them of what they justly possess; they may prove an Offence and Scandal to them, and so lead them into Sin; they may tend to our own immediate Hurt and Damage: The Motives which induce us to them, the Time, the Place, the Means and Method of doing them, with others the like Circumstances, may aggravate them to almost an infinite Degree; and by consequence it may so happen, that a Sin which appears small to those who consider it not with due Attention, shall be judged monstrous by others, who search it to the bottom, and view it in its proper Magnitude.

This is what frequently happens to the same Person, in respect of the same Sins, according as they judge of them, either before, or after they have committed them. Before the Commission, they appear of little Weight and Consequence; because the Mind disturb'd by some Passion, is unable to judge rightly and soundly of them, and because any particular



ticular Sin is then only considered with relation to the Pleasure, or Profit which it may afford. But when the Act is once over, and when the heat of the Passion being allay'd, Men reflect upon the Sin in cold Blood, they see it then in its true Shape and Colours, and think it as odious and frightful as they fancied it charming and agreeable before.

It were happy if we always judg'd in this manner, and especially if when solicited by any Temptation to offend God, we would fully open our Eyes to discern and consider all that was Filthy and Brutal, all that was Unjust and Criminal, all that was contrary to our Duty and our Interest, in the Action before us. Did we proceed with this Caution, we should scarce ever yield to such Temptations, at least we should not so often be their Captives.

Can we believe that *David* would have forcibly taken *Bath-sheba* to his Bed, if before the Commission of that horrible Act, he had distinctly view'd all the particular Irregularities that were assembled and accumulated in it; all the Injustice of so flagrant, so finish'd Adultery, all the Baseness of *Uriah's* Murther, all the Ingratitude with which he repaid the Service of that Valiant Man, all the Scandal which he gave to his Subjects, and, in general, all that he saw and apprehended, when, his Conscience being awakened out of its long Slumber, he vented all those Reproaches against himself which we find in his Penitential Psalms? For my own part, I am perswaded, that not only *David*,  
who

who had a Spirit so full of Piety, would have preserved his Innocence, but that *Judas*, that even the detestable *Judas*, had never betray'd our Lord, if these two Sinners before they ventur'd on their respective Crimes, had view'd them in so full a Light as they did after they had miserably fallen into them.

It is not enough, therefore, barely to examine, Whether an Action which presents it self be Good or Evil. We must endeavour to understand all the Good, and all the Evil, contain'd in it. If it be Evil, we must enquire, in what particular respects it is contrary to our Duty, and to the Divine Will. If it be Good, we must try to discover the precise degree not only of its Goodness, but of its Necessity, together with all the Evil that would attend the final Omission of it, and all the Danger and Loss we should incur if we neglected the present Opportunity of performing it. This is the first Duty of Conscience; let us pass on to the Second.

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### C H A P. III.

*The second Duty of Conscience : It ought to make a good Judgment ; that is, in the first place, it ought to judge rightly.*

**T**H E second Duty of Conscience is to make a good Judgment: But this one  
Duty

Duty consists of three Parts. To make a Good Judgment, or to judge well, is first to judge rightly, and in conformity to Truth and Justice: Secondly, it is, to Judge pre-emptorily, without hesitation or demur: And, Thirdly, it is to judge Resolutely and with Constancy, not suffering it self to be perverted either by the Authority of others, or by its own Lusts and Passions. These several Parts being each of them highly important, ought, with all possible Care and Exactness, to be farther explain'd.

I say, therefore, in the first place, That it belongs to the Duty of Conscience, to pronounce rightly on the Qualities of all Actions which offer themselves to our Choice, declaring those to be good which are really so, and condemning those as Evil, which are forbidden, and never calling Evil Good, or Good Evil.

The reason is, because to act otherwise, would be to deceive our selves, and to be led into Error: For Error is always a wandering of the Spirit: 'Tis always an Imperfection, and a Default, which we are bound with the utmost Care to avoid.

But besides this General Reason, there is another more Particular; it is, That these Errors of Conscience may be attended with very dreadful Effects: They may lead us to the Commission of Actions the most heinous in their Nature. This is what they do every Day; and whenever this happens, the Error of our Conscience, which we blindly follow, cannot hinder but that what is criminal in such Actions shall be fully laid to our Charge.

The



The Conscience is that inward Eye, or Eye of the Soul, to which our Lord chiefly had regard, tho' seeming to speak only of the outward, or bodily Eye, when he said, *The Light of the Body is the Eye: if therefore* Matt. vi. 22, 23 *thy Eye be single, thy whole Body shall be full of Light. But if thine Eye be Evil, thy whole Body shall be full of Darknesh. If therefore the Light that is in thee be Darknesh, how great is that Darknesh?*

But for the clearer apprehension of this whole Matter, it is needful to observe, that there are three sorts of Errors, which the Conscience, as employ'd about its Act of judging, may fall into. The first consists in judging that to be sinful which is innocent: The second inclines us to esteem that as innocent which is Sinful. The Third goes farther still, and makes us judge that which is sinful not only to be Innocent but even Necessary.

Those of the first kind are certainly the least dangerous, and yet even those are attended with considerable Danger. They have two very unhappy Consequences: First, They render the Business of Religion much more painful and difficult than it really is, and by this means break our hopes of succeeding in it, the Effect of which is Discouragement, and sometimes Despair.

Again, 'Tis very possible, and indeed very probable, that we shall act against these false Maxims which we have establish'd for the Rules of our Conduct; for if the best of Men every Day transgress those which are really prescrib'd by God, how can it be imagined

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that they should keep themselves from transgressing those which are of Human Invention, and which are commonly more difficult to be observed than the true and genuine Commands?

For Instance, There are some Persons who believe that all Pleasure, of whatsoever kind, is sinful, if enjoy'd without Necessity. Thus they fancy that to look on a Flower, or to smell to it, is a Sin, if we do it barely for the Pleasure which we take in the Sight, or in the Smell. Into what perplexity, and into how many Scruples does this Opinion cast those who are prejudiced with it? Or what do they find in the whole World but so many Snares which they believe God has set for them on all sides?

Nay there are some who pretend that the Apostolical Injunction to abstain from things Strangled and from Blood, is still in force, and who, consequently, think themselves bound to observe it; but into what Doubts and Difficulties are they not necessarily led by such a Perswasion? For if this Ordinance still obtain'd, we could scarce avoid Sinning, even when we kept within the strictest Rules of Temperance. How many sorts of Meat are there, which consist only of the Flesh of those Animals, whose Blood could not have been let out? Such are Birds, for the most part, and commonly Beasts kill'd in Hunting: So that they who are possess'd by this Scruple, must perpetually be upon their Guard, and must *ask Questions for Conscience sake*, about all that is set before them, contrary to the Direction of *St. Paul*.

Indeed

Indeed, they Sin, if they do otherwise ; for as we shall shew hereafter, that which is judg'd to be sinful, however innocent in it self, cannot innocently be perform'd. Therefore Errors of this first kind must be allow'd to be very dangerous.

But, those of the second kind are so in a much higher degree: They consist in our judging that to be Innocent which is really Sinful. Is it not very natural that such Errors should carry us into far greater Extravagancies? Is it not probable that we shall make use of our supposed Liberty? For why should we abstain from what we think to be lawful, if any Consideration of Interest, or Pleasure, otherwise incline us to undertake it?

'Tis for this reason, that all *Christians* have so great an abhorrence of loose Tenets and Opinions, and the detestable Authors, who invent or publish them. These Persons are justly look'd on as Publick Empoisoners, who by the Venome of their pernicious Imaginations cause Spiritual Death to those who are weak enough to embrace them as true and solid Doctrines.

Yet there are no Errors more fatal than those of the third kind, by which we judge that which is really sinful not only to be innocent but even necessary. For when Men fall into such Errors, 'tis almost impossible but that they should Sin, either by violating the Law of God to follow the Motions of their own Conscience, or by acting against the Motions of Conscience, which is the immediate Rule of Practice.



But, some will say, is it certainly thus sinful both ways, either to act against the Dictates of an Erroneous Conscience, or to follow and obey them? The whole Matter turns on this Point, which is indeed the Foundation of all that I shall deliver in the present Book. It may therefore not be amiss to spend some time in clearing and explaining it.

I say, then, in the first place, that a Man may Sin by following the Dictates of an abused Conscience. This appears to me to be evident beyond all Dispute.

When our Lord says in the Gospel, the Time shall come that they who *kill* his Disciples, shall *think they do God service*, he plainly speaks of an Action perform'd according to the Dictates of an erroneous Conscience; but at the same time, he speaks of a most unjust and wicked Action, and such as deserved to be punished with the utmost severity: This is what every one will readily grant.

The *Jews* in crucifying our Saviour committed, no doubt, the blackest and most execrable of all Crimes; and yet 'tis certain they committed it, by following the Motions of their Conscience, and by giving way to a blind Zeal, a *Zeal without Knowledge*, as *St. Paul* styles it in his Epistle to the *Romans*.

And when that Apostle, before his Conversion, persecuted the Church, he acted by a Zeal of the very same Nature: *As concerning Zeal*, says he, *I was persecuting the Church*. Yet this Zeal did not hinder him from being

ing a *Blasphemer, a Persecutor, and Injurious*; the Titles which he bestows on himself in his first Epistle to *Timothy*.

But this being uncontested, I shall not insist on its Proof; it will be more important to examine, Whether that which is acknowledged sometimes to happen, does indeed always happen; and whether a Man sins whensoever he obeys the Guidance of a Conscience mistaken in its Judgments: Which Enquiry shall be the Business of the following Chapter.

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#### C H A P. IV.

*In what Cases it is sinful to follow the Motions of an abused Conscience.*

AS all Men are agreed, that we may sin by conforming to the Judgments of an erroneous Conscience, so they are no less agreed that the contrary may sometimes happen. 'Tis agreed, that there are some innocent Mistakes, which not only alleviate, but absolutely excuse, whatever is Evil, or Sinful, in the Actions consequent upon them. Thus, for Instance, none will condemn *Oedipus* for having, utterly without his Knowledge, married his Mother. But we find a wide difference in Mens Opinions as to the Enquiry, when Error excuses, and when it does not.

Some pretend that Errors in point of Fact excuse always, and Errors in point of

Law never; but this Rule is by no means infallible. There are Errors in point of Law which do excuse, and there are Errors in point of Fact which do not. A Law absolutely unknown, and never publicly declared, cannot oblige, and, by consequence, the Error which is opposed to it must be innocent. On the other hand, an Error concerning such a Fact as we might, and ought to have known, is Sinful, and can no way excuse: Such was the Error of the *Pharisees*, who conceived our Lord to be a Magician, and to cast out Devils, by a secret intelligence with *Beelzebub*.

Others tell us, That an Error opposed to Human Law is innocent; but not an Error opposed to Divine Law: This Rule is alike uncertain as the former. There may be such a Divine Law, the Ignorance of which shall not be sinful; and there may be such an Human Law of which we are bound not to be ignorant. This depends on the Promulgation of each Law, agreeably to what I but now observed.

Lastly, there are still others who say, that a Man may be ignorant of the Divine Positive Law without Sin, but not of the Law of Nature. By the Law of Nature they mean that which prescribes things good in themselves; such, for instance, as is contain'd in the Decalogue, excepting the Ceremonial part of the fourth Commandment. By Positive Law they mean, that which wholly depends on the free and arbitrary pleasure of the Legislator; such was the *Jewish* Ritual Law, and such is that part of the *Christian* which relates to the Use of the Sacraments.

But



But neither is this Rule, of any Certainty, at least with respect to the Positive Law of God; the Ignorance of which, when sufficiently notified, is always Criminal. Nay, there are some Restrictions to be made, even with regard to the Law of Nature; as will hereafter appear.

If the Patrons of these several Opinions were content to say, that, for the most part, an Error excused rather in Fact than in Law; rather in Human Law than in Divine; rather in Divine Positive Law than in the Law of Nature, they would say nothing but what is allow'd for Truth. But if they pretend to erect any one of these three Observations into a standing and perpetual Rule, they will certainly be mistaken; as is clear from the Evidences which I have now given.

We are therefore to seek out some other Rules; and I take the best and safest to be that which I have set down in another Work. Error excuses, or justifies, when it is the Effect of invincible and involuntary Ignorance; but it does not operate in this manner, when the Ignorance from whence it springs is such, as we might and ought to have avoided.

Here it will be observ'd, that I distinguish Error from Ignorance, as the Effect from the Cause: For, indeed, Error implies something Positive; that is, a false Judgment, whereas Ignorance supposes only a bare privation of Knowledge; which may happen, when we do not actually Judge. There can be no such positive Error with-

out Ignorance; but there may very well be Ignorance without Error.

I say, therefore, that so often as Error is the Product of Invincible, and Involuntary Ignorance, it excuses the Faults which are committed under it: For 'tis a constant Rule, that no Man's obliged to what is properly and absolutely impossible. So that whenever it is absolutely impossible to come to the Knowledge of the Truth, an Error entertained on this account is not imputed as Sin

This is what often happens in relation to Fact: As no one will censure *Jacob* for his Error in taking *Leah* for *Rachel*: And sometimes we see it exemplified in respect of Law. Those *Americans*, for Instance, who lived before the Discoveries of *Columbus* had carried the *Christian* Faith into their Country, did not Sin in omitting to be Baptiz'd; because indeed, they knew not, nor could know the Necessity of Baptism.

Luke xii.  
47, 48.

But when a Man is capable of knowing the Truth, and is obliged actually to know it, his Ignorance of it is then blameable and punishable; and the Errors which he falls into by means of this Ignorance, are imputed to him as Criminal: *That Servant which knew his Lord's Will* (says our Blessed Saviour,) *and prepared not himself, neither did according to his Will, shall be beaten with many Stripes: But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of Stripes, shall be beaten with few Stripes.* The Latter we see is punish'd, tho' not with so much Rigour and Severity as the Former.

If

*If I had come and not done among them the Works which none other Man did, they had not had Sin ; but now they have no cloak for their Sin,* says our Lord of the Jews in his time. John xv, 21, 24.

So that we have nothing to do, in any particular Case, but to enquire whether the Ignorance which is pleaded be really invincible and involuntary : But it highly imports us not to misapprehend these Terms. By an invincible Ignorance I do not mean, that out of which we cannot be deliver'd, either by the bare Strength of Nature, or even by those supernatural Succours which we have already receiv'd : But I mean that which we cannot overcome, either by doing all that our Natural Powers permit, or by making use of those supernatural Aids which have been hitherto afforded us : Or, Lastly, even by imploying that farther Assistance which we have not yet obtain'd from Heaven, but which we may obtain, if we pray for it as we ought.

I suppose, therefore, I. That we are not to stay and expect, till the Truth shall manifestly display it self to our sight, and prevent our Enquiry. It is our Duty to seek after it. The Wise Man would have us be at the Expence of purchasing and buying it ; *Buy the Truth, and sell it not.* And our blessed Saviour commands us, in order to this, to *search the Scriptures*, which are the Fountains and Repositories of Truth.

I suppose in the Second place, That barely to seek the Truth is not sufficient. We ought to implore the Divine Assistance, if we wish that our Enquiries should prove successful ;



*James i. 5.* cessful ; *If any Man lack Wisdom, says St. James, let him ask of God, who giveth to every one liberally, and upbraideth not.*

Lastly, I suppose, That neither to ask or implore this Assistance is yet enough ; but we ought to ask it aright, as the Apostle teaches us in the same place. We ought to ask it with Faith, with Humility, with Ardour, and with Perseverance.

If it were impossible to do any one of these Three things, or if upon doing them all, we continued still Ignorant, I confess this Ignorance would be truly invincible : But if they are all possible, and yet any one of them is neglected by us, 'tis evident we can complain only of our selves.

The other Term or Epithet, is to be explain'd almost in the same manner. By an Involuntary Ignorance, I do not absolutely mean such as has been never sought by the express and formal Act of the Will. But I likewise include such as is neither the effect nor the Consequence of Inconsideration. And thus I make five Classes of Persons who are voluntarily Ignorant.

*Job xxi. 14.* The first Class consists of those who positively covet to be Ignorant, and who, like the Wicked Man spoken of in the Book *Job*, *say unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy Ways.* This Ignorance is justly itiled affected and malicious.

The second Class is compos'd of such as do not indeed positively court and affect Ignorance, yet such as entertain no Desire of Knowledge, nor take any care to be instructed. This is what we term gross, or stupid Ignorance. Those

Those of the third Class wish and desire to inform themselves, and make some feeble Efforts in virtue of this good Inclination :

But these Efforts bearing no proportion to the greatness of the Work, become Unprofitable and and Fruitless.

Those of the fourth Class do almost all that is in their Power. They read, they meditate, they advise with the Learned and Knowing : But they implore not the Assistance of Almighty God. They do not beg his Light and Guidance, without which their best Endeavours are in vain.

Those who make up the last Class labour and pray together : But their Prayers are not carried on with such Zeal, such Confidence, such Ardour, such Humility, as can alone render them effectual ; so that they ask and obtain not, but continue still in Darkeness.

Let every Man, before he pleads Ignorance in his own Excuse, consider well if it do not really belong to one of the five Sorts which have been here describ'd. I am persuaded, that there are very few who will not be silenc'd by this Reflexion.

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## C H A P. V.

*An Objection Answer'd : Whether our Errors may be as Involuntary as our Ignorance.*

I Doubt not but those Readers who have more Sagacity than others, will here  
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encounter me with a very specious Objection. They'll say, 'tis easy indeed to apprehend that Ignorance may be blameless; because 'tis very possible it may be Invincible. Involuntary. But they'll add, that the Case is not the same with regard to Error. They'll maintain, that we may for ever avoid falling into this; and that for our own Security, we need only observe the Rule of the New Philosophers, which is, to suspend our Judgment, when we are at a loss for clear and apparent Evidence. Proceeding thus, we can never be deceiv'd: But if we refuse to apply this Precaution, which seems so just and reasonable, and if we judge at all Adventures, without Knowledge or Light, 'tis certain we shall very often impose upon ourselves; but then the Error into which we run will be voluntary; and by Consequence, unable to excuse or justify us.

We must not hope to elude the force of this Argument, by saying, that 'tis true no one can deceive himself, if he observes the Philosophical Maxim here prescrib'd; but that 'tis impossible to observe it, because there are infinite Cases in which we must necessarily determine, (as there are infinite Occasions on which we must necessarily act) and yet there are very few in which we can determine with this degree of Evidence and Conviction.

These two last Propositions are very certain: But then 'tis certain likewise, that we may act without deciding the Question about which we are in suspense. For Instance, I am considering, and am uneasy to know, whether



whether I ought to make Restitution in a doubtful Case. I have Reasons to persuade me that 'tis necessary. I have other Reasons inclining me to believe that 'tis not so. I cannot determine this Point by reflecting on the Nature of the Duty it self: But I resolve at length, by virtue of another Principle: I doubt whether such Restitution be just. This is enough for my Direction; for in dubious Matters we are always obliged to take the surer and safer side; as the Act of Restitution certainly is in the present Case.

This Objection must be own'd to be very pressing; and I cannot but wish, that some Learned and Judicious Person had examin'd it before me. His Observations would prove of great use and assistance to me, and I should be able much more easily and readily to determine my self: But as I know none who has yet enter'd on this Undertaking, so I shall propose my own Thoughts on the Point, with no other Design but to submit them entirely to the Judgment of those who have a clearer Discernment, and a more thorough Penetration. My Opinion, then, on the present Subject, is as follows.

I cannot easily persuade my self, that we ought to condemn absolutely, and without exception, all those who judge upon imperfect Evidence. If this was allow'd in no Case, and if we could not do it without sinning against the Rules of Prudence, or of Piety, of the former in Civil, and Natural, of the latter in Religious Affairs, we must then wholly abstain from that Species of Judgments which are term'd Opinions, and  
which

which we express by saying, *I think, I reckon, I believe* ; the last of these Words being also frequently taken in this Sense : That is, in short, we must scarce ever judge at all : For how few Occasions are there, on which we can pronounce with Certainty and Assurance ?

Besides, upon this Supposition, humane Faith must be totally excluded, and be banish'd the World : For every one can see that 'tis not absolutely impossible, but we may be misled, by the Testimony of the most irreprovable Witnesses, if they should either be deceiv'd themselves, or should have an Intention of deceiving us.

But what appears to me as most considerable is, That if in every emergent Doubt, whether of Fact or of Law, we were oblig'd to suspend our Judgment till Evidence should offer it self, and yet were at the same time obliged to take the safer side, we should be rack'd every Moment between so dreadful Extremes, that our Life would be a Burthen to us, and we should wish never to have been taken out of our Primitive Nothing. There would scarce be any thing which we might innocently do ; because scarce any thing in which we must not run some hazard and danger ; as every one will readily apprehend, who does but reflect on his own Method of acting.

I confess, therefore, that no Man would ever be deceiv'd, if he observed the Rule which these Philosophers recommend ; but at the same time I am likewise persuaded of two things : First, That no Man, not excepting the most strict and holy, did ever yet observe it : And Secondly, That to pretend

tend thus never to be deceiv'd, is to aspire to a Perfection which exceeds the Measures of humane Nature, at least upon this Earth, and during our Mortal Life.

But still, some will say, what Return shall we make to the Objection? I answer, That absolutely speaking there is no such thing as invincible and involuntary Error: This is what must be allow'd on all Hands: So that if God should deal with us according to the most rigid Justice, he might impute to us all those Failings which are occasion'd by our Error, of whatsoever kind or degree. But out of his infinite Condescension to our Frailty and Weakness, he lays not those to our Charge which are inevitable to Humanity, consider'd under all its Infirmities.

But it will be urg'd by some, That this is too general, whereas they want a more precise and particular Direction: They want a Rule to inform them what Errors are excusable, and what are unworthy of all Excuse: I think it is not impossible to give them such a Rule; and if I mistake not, they will find it in what I am now going to lay down.

And Error is excusable, when attended with three Conditions: First, If it be absolutely impossible to attain a full and certain Knowledge of the Truth; and if, consequently, the Ignorance which occasions this Error be absolutely Invincible and Involuntary. Secondly, If in default of such Certainty, we are govern'd and determin'd by the greatest Probability. Thirdly, If the Persuasion which this Probability creates in us, do not rise above its Fountain, nor make us  
fancy



fancy our selves to be possess'd of infallible Truth.

The first of these Conditions is highly reasonable, and appears so from what I observ'd on this Subject in the Chapter immediately preceding.

The Second is founded upon as good Reason : For should we not act very rashly and imprudently, in preferring a smaller Probability to a greater ?

The Third Condition is likewise necessary : For, indeed, what can be more insupportable, than the Proceeding of those who give themselves entirely up to bare Probabilities ; and treat all such as are not of their Opinion, sometimes as absurd and ridiculous, sometimes as foolish and extravagant, and sometimes as abominable and impious ?

These Three Conditions, therefore, are requisite in the Case : But now the first of them excludes all Errors contrary to Natural Law, and even to Positive Law sufficiently Notified, as will hereafter be shew in particular. The Second of them has the same Influence on most of those Errors of Fact into which the greatest part of Mankind every Day fall. The Third Condition exempts from the number of excusable Errors, all such as are not accompanied with Equity and Modesty.

There being only these Three Kinds of Errors which to me seem inexcusable, I believe the Three Conditions but now recited to be sufficient, and think it unnecessary to inforce them by subjoining any others.

## C H A P. VI.

*Whether a Man may be innocently Ignorant, either of Positive Law, or of that Species of Natural Law, which 'tis impossible to know without Revelation?*

IT is agreed amongst Divines, as I formerly intimated, that God has given us two sorts of Laws, Natural and Positive. The Natural are commonly distinguished by two Marks or Characters : The First is, That they require of us such things alone as are in their own Nature just, necessary and immutable. The Second is, That bare Reason and its Light duly applied, will discover to us all the Duties which these Laws enjoin. On the contrary, the sole Object of Positive Laws are things in their own Nature indifferent, which become Good or Evil, only by the Command, or the Prohibition, of the Legislator. Whence it follows, That the Divine Laws of this kind are not to be known but by Revelation.

This Distinction is in one Sense very good and useful ; but I fear it does not reach the full extent of the present Subject. I am mistaken if there be not a third Species of Divine Laws, different from these two which have been now mention'd, and in some measure partaking of both. Those Laws I mean which prescribe such Duties as are holy, just and unchangeable in themselves ; yet such as 'tis impossible to have (I will not say

a distinct Knowledge, but) the least Suspicion of without express Revelation. Such is that Law which commands us to Worship the Eternal Son of God, and the Holy Spirit : Such is that which forbids us to blaspheme these Divine Persons.

Nothing is more just, or more immutable, than the Duty which this Command enjoins. Nothing more criminal, and more unworthy to be tolerated, than the Outrage which this Prohibition condemns : And yet the bare Light of Nature is not sufficient to discover to us, either the Justice of the Duty, or the Irregularity of the Crime. 'Tis necessary we should have express Revelation for this purpose, as well as for our Instruction in the Duties prescrib'd by those Laws which we style Positive.

But whatever Difference there may be between Positive Laws, and those of the third Species here describ'd, there's no reason that the Latter should be now consider'd separately from the Former : For, indeed, we are not now treating of the Mutability or Immutability of the Duties enjoin'd. We are only enquiring, Whether a Man may be ignorant of them without Sin. In which respect, the Laws of these two Kinds are no way distinguish'd ; it being common to both, that they cannot possibly be discover'd, unless they are supernaturally reveal'd.

Now, what is of the greatest Importance on this Subject, may be comprized under two Assertions. The First Assertion is, That such Persons to whom the Laws of this double Order or Kind have not yet been publicly



lickly notified, may be ignorant of them without Sin, and consequently are without Sin in not observing them. By virtue of this Principle, I cannot but think that those *Americans* who lived before the Voyages of the *Spaniards* had made any Impression on that New World, were excusable in not believing in *Jesus Christ*, and not embracing his Gospel: For how was it possible they should do either, while they were wholly unacquainted with both? *How shall they believe* (says St. Paul) *in Him of whom they have not heard?*

And here 'tis in vain to object, That the Apostles did indeed extend their Travels to these vast and remote Regions, and carried thither the Light of the Gospel, which the Natives have since, by their want of Care and Diligence, suffer'd to go out: For not to say at present, that if the Apostles had cross'd the *Atlantic Ocean*, St. Clement of *Rome*, who was their Disciple, could not have been a Stranger to that Expedition, who yet was so far from knowing any such matter, that in his Epistle to the *Corinthians*, he styles the Sea which divides our World from the Worlds beyond it, *unpassable*: Leaving, I say, this Dispute, with which we are not here concern'd, it will be enough to observe, That supposing the Objection to be true in Fact, yet it could no way invalidate our present Argument.

For we are not speaking of the Ignorance of those whom the Objection supposes to have let the Knowledge of the Truth be lost and extinct in their Country. We speak only of the Ignorance of their Descendants, of

such especially as did not come into the World till many Ages after them. Now I maintain, that supposing this Knowledge to have been utterly extinct in those parts of the World, it had been no less impossible for the last of the said Descendants to have known that they ought to believe in *Jesus Christ*, than if the Apostles had never instructed their Fore-fathers.

But it is by no means the same Case with those to whom this Truth has been propos'd, especially if the Proposal were made in a clear and distinct manner, and enforc'd with any such Motive as ought to engage its reception. All such Persons are guilty beyond dispute, if they do not embrace and believe it, and, consequently if they do not observe the Duties contain'd in it; agreeably to what our Lord assures his Disciples:

Mark xvi. *He that believeth, and is baptized shall be sav'd;*  
16. *but he that believeth not shall be damn'd.*

Upon the same Principle, I am perswaded, that all those who having had Opportunity, as well as Obligation, to know the true Religion, not only reject it, but utter virulent Discourses either against the Mysteries which this Religion teaches, or against the Divinity which it commands us to adore, are guilty of Blasphemy before God, and worthy of Eternal Punishment.

This seems to me most unquestionable; and I am surpriz'd to find that so able a Person as the Author of the *Philosophical Commentary*, should assert the opposite Doctrine, pretending, that the Sin of Blasphemy can fall on those only who affront or de-  
ride

ride the Divinity whom they know, and of whose Majesty and Greatness they are truly convinc'd. The contrary to which is directly shewn in the Holy Scriptures.

The *Assyrians* acknowledg'd not the God of *Israel*; yet the Holy Scripture in three different places gives the name of Blasphemies to those impious Speeches with which *Rabshaketh* reproached and reviled him. I know, it is pretended by the *Rabbins*, that *Rabshaketh* was an Apostate Jew; and *Grotius* approves of their Conceit. But besides that this said is without Authority, it would be of no force in the present Argument, to say that *Rabshaketh* was a Jew by Birth, unless it could be affirm'd, that he was a Jew by Religion. *Servetus* was Baptiz'd, Educated, and Instructed in the Faith of the Holy Trinity: He afterwards renounced this Faith, and 'tis urged, That his Renunciation was sufficient to hinder the Name of Blasphemy from being affixed to those horrible and execrable Outrages which he vented against this Divine Mystery. But now if his Apostacy hindered his impious Contumelies from being properly Blasphemous, why should not the Apostacy of *Rabshaketh* be allowed the same Effect?

But not to dwell on this Instance, the Scripture does not only charge *Rabshaketh* with Blasphemy against God, but it likewise charges his Master, King *Sennacherib*. He wrote also Letters to rail on, (or to blaspheme) the Lord God of *Israel*. It is possible therefore, for Men to blaspheme a Divinity whom they do not know or believe.



To give a more particular Example, and such as precisely comes up to the Case, The *Pharisees* did neither acknowledge our Lord to be the Son of God, nor the Spirit by which he spake and acted to be the Spirit of God; yet when these miserable Opposers traduced him as casting out Devils by *Beelzebub*, he answers, *Verily I say unto you all Sins shall be forgiven unto the Sons of Men, and Blasphemies wherewith soever they shall Blaspheme: but he that shall Blaspheme against the Holy Ghost, hath never forgiveness*; and St. Mark has sub-  
 Mark]iii. 28,29,30. join'd this Explication, *Because they said he hath an unclean Spirit.*

Here we have Persons who knew not that the Spirit which guided our Blessed Saviour was the Holy and Divine Spirit; and yet our Lord assures them, that by the opprobrious Term of an *Unclean Spirit*, they blasphemed against the Holy Ghost, and that this their Blasphemy was so heinous as never to be forgiven. A Man therefore may be guilty of Sin, and even of Blasphemy, by uttering Contumelious Words against a Divinity whom he does not own or worship.

The *Jews* of *Antioch* in *Pisidia*, were no better acquainted either with the Divinity of our Saviour, or with the Truth of his Gospel: They could not therefore blaspheme against him, if this Author's Hypothesis were true. Yet St. Luke informs us  
 Acts xiii. 45. that they did so: *The Jews, (says he) when they saw the Multitude, were filled with Envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.*

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There is one Instance behind, after which it will be unnecessary to add any others. St. Paul, before his Conversion, persecuted the Church, and spoke unworthily of our Lord. He declares that he did this in Ignorance: His, therefore, is the very Case, which the Author of the *Philosophical Commentary* would suppose; and yet this did not secure him against the Title of a Blasphemer; *Who was before* (says he of himself) *a Blasphemer, and a Persecutor, and Injurious; but I obtained Mercy, because I did it ignorantly, in Unbelief.* <sup>1 Tim. i. 13.</sup>

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## C H A P. VII.

*Whether 'tis possible to be ignorant of the Law of Nature without Sin?*

**T**HE most difficult part of our Enquiry is, Whether the Ignorance of Natural Law may be Invincible, and Involuntary, and therefore Innocent. For my own part, I am perswaded of the Negative: My Reason is, because God has engraven this Species of Law in the Hearts of all Men: *The Gentiles which have not the Law,* (says St. Paul) *do by Nature the things contained in the Law, and having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves. Which shew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts, their Conscience also bearing Witness, and their Thoughts in the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.* <sup>Rom. ii. 14, 15.</sup>

Now if instead of managing and improving this Light, Men choak and stifle it by abandoning themselves to their Lusts; and if by long Custom of Sinning they are besotted to such a degree as not to discern things which are thus clear and evident, they are highly blameable, and most justly deserve to be punish'd. It is therefore that St. Paul assures us, *Tribulation and Anguish shall be upon every Soul of Man that doth Evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile. For (says he) as many as have sinned without Law, shall also perish without Law; and as many as have sinned in the Law shall be judged by the Law.*

Rom. ii. 9,  
12.

Rom. i. 18,  
19, 20, 21,  
24.

What the same Apostle declares of the Heathen Idolaters, is likewise very strong and forcible, in our present Argument. *The Wrath of God (says he) is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of Men, who hold the Truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has shewn it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the Creation of the World are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his Eternal Power and Godhead: so that they are without excuse. Because that when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their Imaginations, and their foolish Heart was darkened. ----- Wherefore, God also gave them up to the Lusts of their own Hearts.*

These Words supply us with several Remarks. First, That St. Paul declares the Pagans of whom he speaks to be without excuse, which is a full decision of the Question before



before us. Secondly, That he builds this Declaration upon no other Principle, but that the true God had made a sufficient discovery of himself to these Men by his Work of Creation, and by the many Effects of his Wisdom and Power conspicuous in it. Thirdly, That the Sin which is charg'd upon them by *St. Paul*, as it was truly such, so it was of the most odious and heinous Nature, because he tells us, that God would not defer the Punishment of it till another Life, but would pour down his Vengeance upon it in this World. He tells us, that the Wrath of God is fully revealed from Heaven against the Impiety of these miserable Men. He tells us that God will add Spiritual Plagues to their Temporal, abandoning them to those Excesses which cannot be named without horror. Elsewhere he assures us, that they shall never enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. And the Holy Spirit, in the *Apocalypse*, assigns them their Portion *in the Lake, Rom. xxi. burning with Fire and Brimstone, which is the 8. second Death.*

But to go farther into this whole Subject than I did in my former Edition, it will be proper to observe that Learned Men are greatly divided upon it.

The *Jansenists*, and some Protestant Divines, *Zanchius* in particular, maintain two Positions. First, That 'tis possible to be invincibly ignorant of the Law of Nature. Secondly, That this Ignorance does not excuse; being the consequence of Original Sin, which in its Cause and Principle is voluntary.

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All the Modern Casuists, and even some of those who have most warmly opposed them upon other Occasions, particularly *J. B. Gonet*, a *Dominican*, and Professor in the University of *Bordeaux*, and Father *Tyrso Gonsales*, General of the *Jesuits*, distinguished three Orders of Natural Laws. The first Order may be said to consist of first Principles, being attended with so bright and undeniable Evidence: Such are these Maxims, *Virtue is to be loved, and Vice to be hated. We ought to do as we would be done by, &c.* The second Order contains the immediate Conclusions inferr'd from these first Principles; and in this Rank they place the whole Decalogue, excepting the fourth Commandment. Those of the third Order are more remote Conclusions, deducible as well from the first Principles, or Maxims of Morality, as from the Precepts of the Decalogue. Under this Head *Medina* and *Vasquez*, followed and cited by the General of the *Jesuits*, reckon those Laws which forbid *Polygamy, Divorce, Simple Fornication, and Revenge.* *Gonsales* adds to these all such Questions as are in Dispute amongst Great Doctors, eminent for Sanctity and Wisdom; as, about the Lawfulness of some particular Contracts, about the Necessity of Restitution in certain Cases, &c.

They say, therefore, that Ignorance with respect to the Natural Laws of the first and second Order, can never be invincible, or innocent; but that it may be both, with respect to those of the third Order.

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The third Opinion is that of all the ancient School-men, and of *M. Huigens*, Professor in *Louvain*. These Authors assert, That every violation of the Law of Nature is Sinful; there being no part of this Law (so far as it relates to our particular Duty) which we can be safely ignorant of.

The first of these Opinions has somewhat in it very hard and disagreeable, and which seems repugnant not only to Good Sense, but to Piety and Religion. And besides, if all such Ignorance were Criminal as is the Effect of Original Sin, the Ignorance of Positive Law must be always so; for even of this we could never have been Ignorant, had Man continued in his Primitive Perfection.

Again, it may well be disputed, Whether an Action be therefore Criminal because it is voluntary in its Principle. Let us suppose a Man to have been punished with the loss of his Hands, or of his Tongue, for a Crime voluntarily committed; would it not be thought very unjust to command him to work, or to speak, in this his miserable Condition? And yet his present Incapacity, was, as to its Principles voluntary. But being involuntary in it self, it will no doubt, be admitted for his Excuse.

We must not therefore build upon so weak a Foundation; so that leaving the first of these Opinions, we are obliged to choose one of the two Latter. Now I am persuaded, That the Opinion of the Casuists will, upon strong and evident Reasons, appear to have

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no more Solidity. Some of these Reasons I shall here set down.

I. I would ask, Whether those things of which we are told a Man may be ignorant without Sin, are such as 'tis impossible he should find out by the utmost Efforts, and the most diligent Search? Or, Whether upon due Application, he might be able to discover them? If the Latter, 'tis plain, the Ignorance of them cannot be invincible. If the Former, I would ask again, How so many other Persons have arriv'd at the Knowledge and Apprehension of them? For, indeed, I make no scruple to affirm, That there is not one of those Truths, about which the Casuists pretend a Man may be innocently mistaken, which has not been fully and distinctly perceiv'd by a great number of Men, not only in the *Christian*, but in the Heathen World. Whoever takes the pains to read what M. *Pfanner*, and M. *Huet*, have written on this Subject, the one in his *Theologia Gentilium*, the other in his *Questiones Alnetane*, will find, that many Heathens have said excellent things concerning it; and that a multitude of Persons have reduced their Sayings into Practice.

It may perhaps be urged, That neither all Persons amongst the Heathens, nor all amongst Christians, have the same Penetration and Sagacity; and that therefore some might apprehend these Truths, while yet others might remain ignorant of them without their own Default: But 'tis easy to Reply, that this indeed would hold good, if the said Truths had been open only to Philosophers

sophers and Professors, and entirely conceal'd from the common People : But since the contrary is certain, and since whole Nations have agreed in the Truths of which we are now speaking, it must be own'd that they are not so abstruse or retir'd, but Men may trace them out, if they apply themselves in earnest to the Enquiry.

II. If any Natural Law might pass for obscure, and for such the Equity of which could not easily be demonstrated, it must, no doubt, be that which condemns Incestuous Marriages. This appears from Three Considerations : First, That some very Polite Nations have been wholly Strangers to this Law : As for Instance, the *Persians* and *Egyptians*. Secondly, That *Scotus*, and his whole Tribe, maintain all the Branches of this Law to be Positive and Arbitrary. Thirdly, That those who own them for Natural and Immutable, alledge no convincing Proof, nor even any probable Argument to that purpose. Let any one give himself the trouble of perusing what the most Learned amongst them have offer'd on the Point : He will find that all is but Conjecture ; and that there are divers Cases in which their Conjectures do not hold, and to which it is indeed impossible to apply them.

And yet, after all, it is certainly true, That the Precepts of this Law, how obscure soever, do no way excuse such as transgress them. Thus much we may plainly gather from what God has declar'd on this Subject, in the Eighteenth of *Leviticus*, where having reckon'd up all these particular Irregularities,  
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He adds, *Defile not your selves in any of these things ; for in all these the Nations are defiled which I cast out before you. And the Land is defiled, therefore I do visit the Iniquity thereof upon it ; and the Land it self vomiteth out her Inhabitants.* If God punish'd these Nations for the said Irregularities, is it not manifest, that to be ignorant of the Law which forbids them must be sinful ?

III. I say the same, of Adultery committed with the Consent of the Husband. This is, no doubt, a Sin against Natural Law ; witness those Words of *St. Paul to the Romans, The Woman which has an Husband, is bound by the Law to her Husband, so long as he liveth ; but if the Husband be Dead, she is loos'd from the Law of her Husband.* So then, if while her Husband liveth she be Married (or join'd) to another Man, she shall be called an *Adulteress*. For the same reason *Tertullian* condemns the Actions of *Socrates*, and of *Cato Uticensis*, in lending out their Wives to their Friends ; *O Sapientia Attica, & Romanae gravitatis exemplum ! leno est philosophus & censor.*

And yet it is certain, That if we abstract from Revelation, which indeed is full and expresse upon the Point, it would be very difficult to prove, that this Action was truly and properly Adultery ; as any one will acknowledge, who shall endeavour to demonstrate it by the bare Light of Nature, and without having recourse to the Word of God.

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IV. I say still the same of simple Fornication. This the Authors whom I am now refuting alledge, as an Instance of such Sins as are indeed opposite to the Law of Nature ; but in so obscure a manner, that one may be very innocently ignorant of their Opposition. I acknowledge, that the Opposition is not here very sensible and apparent : But, at the same time, it must be confess'd, that 'tis sufficient to hinder those who transgress it from excusing themselves on the Score of Ignorance, which we may infer from several Particulars. For, in the first place, St. Paul reckons this Sin in the number of those to which God abandon'd the Heathens, as a Punishment for their Neglect of his Knowledge and Worship. *Wherefore (says he) God* *Rom. i. 24,*  
*also gave them up to Uncleaness, through the* *29.*  
*Lusts of their own Hearts, to dishonour their own Bodies between themselves ; ---- being filled with all Unrighteousness, Fornication, Wickedness, &c.* But if simple Fornication was innocent to the Heathens, how could it be here made a part of their Punishment ? It was not a *Physical* Evil, that's certain. Unless therefore it were a *Moral* Evil, as the Casuists pretend it was not, how could God be said to have taken Vengeance, in permitting these Sinners to indulge themselves in the Practice of it ?

The same Sin is by the same Apostle elsewhere ranked with those which exclude from Heaven. *Be not deceived (says he,) neither* *1 Cor. vi.*  
*Fornicator, nor Idolators, ---- shall inherit the* *9, 11.*  
*Kingdom of God : To which he subjoins, and such were some of you ; but ye are washed, but ye*  
*are*

are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. If the *Corinthians* had need to be thus wash'd, and sanctified, and justified from their Impurity, who can deny this Impurity to have been Criminal? What Purification can be requisite, for the effacing of Actions entirely innocent?

Lastly, The Shame affix'd to this Sin amongst all Nations, and the Esteem which the World has ever had for Chastity, assigning it a very honourable place in the List of Virtues, are manifest Arguments, that Nature sufficiently declares her self on the Point, and that we are highly blameable if we do not apprehend her.

V. All that has been hitherto said relates to the Heathen World, not excepting the most ignorant, and most barbarous Parts of it. And what then shall we say of *Christians*, who enjoy so many Advantages to which the miserable Heathens were utter Strangers? They have the Word of God, that living Fountain of Light, which, according to our Royal Prophet, *is a Lamp unto our Feet, and a Light unto our Path*. And they may farther obtain the supernatural Assistance of Divine Grace, which God will never deny to those who pray for it with Humility and pious Affection.

In a Word, Three things may be affirmed with certainty upon this Point. First, That the most Ignorant may implore the Help of God, and the Illumination of his Holy Spirit. Secondly, That these Divine Succours may put them into a Condition of knowing  
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all that is requisite to be known, in order to their serving and pleasing God. Thirdly; That God will not withhold these Succours from those who sue for them, after the manner which He has prescrib'd in his Holy Word.

No Man will dispute the Truth of the two former Assertions; and as for the third and last, it is clearly and expressly deliver'd in the Sacred Writings. What can be more direct, and more positive, than that Saying of St. James, *If any of you lack Wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all Men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him?* Cap. i. v. 5. What can this Wisdom be of which the Apostle speaks, but that which instructs us in our Duty, and of which David and Solomon assure us, that *the Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom?* And yet we see that, according to St. James, in order to the obtaining this Wisdom, we need only ask it; and if we have it not, it is, as he afterwards observes, either because we *ask not*, or because we *ask amiss*.

What can be more express than the Words of our Lord Himself; *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you?* Mat. vii. 7. Again, *If ye being evil know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him?* Luk. xi. 13. And again, *If any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine.* John xii. 17. Lastly, He has promised us, *If any Man will love me,---- my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him.* John xiv. 21.



Men must either accuse his Promises as false, vain and delusory ; that is, they must utter an horrid Blasphemy, or else they must confess that God never refuses the Light of his Knowledge and Truth to those who ask it as they ought. And indeed 'tis unconceivable, that God, who is often pleas'd to reveal himself to those who hate and affront him, should not vouchsafe to bestow this Grace on those who pray for it with Humility, Faith and Love. He permits himself to be found of those who search not after him ; How is it possible he should conceal himself from those who diligently seek him ?

After this, Who will maintain, that the Ignorance of our Duty can be Innocent, Invincible, or Involuntary ? Are we then innocently negligent, when we refuse to beg of God the enlightning Grace of his Holy Spirit, so precious in it self, and so necessary to us ? Can it be impossible, either to succeed with this Aid and Assistance, or to obtain it from his Hands who never denies it to those who call upon him ? Lastly, Can we be said to be ignorant against our Wills, of that which we might certainly know, if we applied the due means of Discovery ?

I shall produce some other Arguments for this Truth, when I enquire hereafter, Whether to follow the greatest Probability be sufficient to justify us ? In the mean time, I shall only observe, that I find but two Reasons which the Defenders of the opposite Opinion alledge for its support, both which appear to me very weak and feeble.

The first is urged by the *General* of the *Jesuites* : He says, 'tis not be imagin'd or conceiv'd, that simple and ignorant Persons should Sin, in following those Opinions which Saints have taught. He supposes these Saints not to have sinned in maintaining such Opinions : And hence he concludes, That it is not Evil to follow them; but what he supposes is not only uncertain but false. Happy were it for the Saints whom we now speak of, if they rightly discharg'd their own Duty. This first Reason therefore, can be of no validity in the Case.

The Second is a little more plausible : It affirms two things. First, That Lay-Persons have not sufficient Light to discover those Truths which have escaped the Knowledge of great and able Professors. Secondly, That there is indeed an infallible way to avoid Sin, when we have not sufficient means of coming at the Truth ; and that is, always to take the safer side. It must be confessed to be so ; yet, can we complain of Inconvenience in doing all that is necessary to keep our selves from Perishing ? Are we not to enter into Life by the Straight Gate ? But because I shall be obliged to resume this Point upon another Occasion, I shall at present dismiss it.

## C H A P. VIII.

*Whether to act against the Motions of an erroneous Conscience be sinful ?*

**I**T appears from what has been now offer'd; that a Man may sin by following the Suggestions of Conscience, when his Conscience is deceived, and when it pronounces, that to be good and innocent, which is quite otherwise. It remains, that we enquire, Whether, on the other hand, it be sinful to act against the Motions of the same deceived Conscience ? and, Whether, for Instance, a Jew, who should now eat of those Meats which are forbidden by the Old Law, would hereby truly and properly Sin ?

Rom. xiv.  
14.

The Casuists, as well of the *Roman* as of the *Protestant* Communion, declare positively in this matter. They all agree, that such an Action would be a real Sin. Indeed, St. Paul himself has given us a formal Decision of the Question : *I know* (says he) *and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of it self; but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.* The Case is about a Practical Error. The Person prepossess'd with this Error falsely imagines, that the use of such a particular Meat is forbidden him by God, and that it must necessarily defile his Heart and Soul. If under this Persuasion he proceeds to eat of the said Meat, he sins : *To him* (says St. Paul) *that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*

But



But the Apostle goes farther : For in the same Chapter he tells us, That we ought not only to be void of Error in respect of any Action, but that we ought to have a strong and firm Persuasion of the Truth ; maintaining that 'tis sinful for us to act while we are in doubt and suspense : *He that doubteth is Vers. 23. damned if he eat, because he eateth not of Faith ; for whatsoever is not of Faith is Sin.*

He explains himself still more clearly on this Point, in another place ; *I testify (says Gal. v. 3. he) to every Man that is Circumcised, that he is a Debtor to do the whole Law.* The use of Circumcision at that time could proceed only from an Error which possess'd some Persons, who against all Truth and Reason conceiv'd, that the Observation of a Precept given by God to his ancient People, was still necessary under the Gospel : Yet St. Paul declares, that this one Error necessarily engaged them to keep the whole Ceremonial Law, of which Law only he is here to be understood. He supposes, therefore, that there may be such Obligations as are founded only upon Error.

Nay, this Truth seems to me to be self-evident : For it is impossible voluntarily to do that which which we think forbidden by God, tho' it be not so, without violating the Reverence which we owe to the Supreme Legislator, and without a Contempt of his Authority, which no doubt must be Criminal.

It cannot be denied, but that he who does a lawful Action, believing it to be forbidden, does it in the same manner as if it were really

forbidden. And thus he is always ready to do what God forbids, nor can the Divine Prohibition engage him to abstain : And who doubts, but that such an habitual Contempt of God's Authority is not a very evil Disposition of Mind, and contains in it somewhat more opposite to true Piety, than a transient Act of Sin ? But if the Disposition be evil, none will pretend that the exercise of it can be innocent.

But that we may view this Case more distinctly, and in its just extent, it will be necessary to go through the Particulars, and to consider all that passes in the Mind and Conscience of the Person affected with it. Let us keep to the Instance of the *Jew*, prepossess'd with an Opinion, that the Ceremonial Law is still in Force ; and consequently, that 'tis the Will of God he should abstain from those kinds of Meat which are forbidden by *Moses*. Let us imagine, that notwithstanding this Prepossession he eats of those Meats, through a Principle of Intemperance. 'Tis easy to apprehend, that here the complex Act is made up of the five Parts following. I. Of an inward Judgment which testifies, that he cannot eat of this Meat without offending God. II. Of another subsequent Judgment, insinuating, that this Meat which he looks upon as forbidden, will be pleasant and agreeable. III. Of another Judgment still, implying, that this Pleasure and Agreeableness is of so great Worth, as that in order to the tasting of it, he need not stick at breaking through the Divine Prohibition. IV. Of a Command given by the

the Will to the Hand and Mouth, for the taking and eating accordingly. V. Of the External Action of the Hand and Mouth, in thus taking and eating.

All this being supposed, I say, the first of these Parts, or simple Action, is not only a false, but a blameable Judgment; not therefore blameable because false, but because the Party who pronounces it has not taken all due care to hinder himself from being deceived in it. The second Judgment is very true, and very innocent. The third includes somewhat that is impious and abominable, and denotes a greater or less degree of Profaneness, according as it is more or less formal and deliberate. The fourth Action, and the fifth, are of themselves indifferent, but become Criminal, in as much as they are the Effects and Consequences of the third, which is so beyond all Dispute. And indeed, all our External Actions, or at least the far greater part of them, are indifferent in their own Nature, and are render'd good or evil, by the sole Influence of our Internal Acts, which are the true Seat, and proper Fountain of Innocence, and of Vice.

However this may be, 'tis certain and uncontestable, that the *Jew* of whom we are speaking, is guilty of Sin; for 'tis impossible that a Man should do an Action which he thinks to be thus forbidden, without preferring the Cause and Motive of it to the Authority of God, and without saying in his Heart, that this Authority is not of so great Consideration, as that in regard to it, he ought to deprive himself of any Profit or



Pleasure ; a Suggestion which is not only sinful, but impious.

But some will argue, If it be a Sin to act contrary to the Motions of Conscience, when engaged in an Error of this kind, it must be a good Action to follow and obey them. I deny this Consequence, and maintain, that 'tis by no means necessary ; for that which is contrary to an evil Action, may very possibly be no less evil.

The Reason is, because any one *Defect* is sufficient to render an Action *evil* ; whereas there must be more than one *Perfection* to denominate it *good*. It is a Defect in the Action of him who proceeds against his Conscience, that he recedes from this immediate Rule of Duty. This is enough to render the Action evil : But to conform to the same Rule, is not enough to render the Action good which is done with such a Conformity, because there may be other Perfections besides this, which it ought to have, but has not : Such, for Instance, is that Care and Diligence which a Man ought to have used, towards the attaining the Knowledge of those Truths that are opposite to the Errors he has imbib'd.

This want of Diligence corrupts the whole Body of the Action, which proceeds from it, and makes it become (if not evil, yet at least) unfruitful ; which evidently appears from those known Words of our Saviour, *In vain do they worship me, teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men*. The Jews who observ'd these Traditions, thought that they did well in observing them ; but were deceiv'd, the Traditions being indeed purely humane,

humane, and such as had not God for their Author: And this was what they might easily have discover'd, if they had taken all due Care to examine the Reports of their Teachers concerning them: But as they did not apply such Care, their Error in this respect was blameable, and the Action consequent upon it wholly unprofitable.

So that this Objection is by no means so strong as some may imagine it: But we shall still have a more lively Sense of its Weakness, if we only apply it to another Subject. The Persons by whom 'tis propos'd complain violently of their being charg'd with maintaining, that all sorts of Errors excuse, and render the Actions occasioned by them entirely innocent. They disclaim this Doctrine, and protest that they are as far as possible from entertaining such a Thought: They declare, that according to their Hypothesis, voluntary Errors do by no means excuse; which indeed is true beyond all Dispute. Let us now apply their Objection to this sort of Errors, and the Absurdity of it will be apparent.

Let us suppose a Man, who thro' a blameable Neglect, has brought himself into a dangerous Error, as for Example, into a false Religion. Let us suppose, that believing this Religion to be true, he is so transported by Passion, as to blaspheme the Divinity which it teaches him to adore. Here his Blasphemy is, without question, sinful: But does it therefore follow, that his Adoration, on the other side, would not be sinful too?

This

This is what none will presume to maintain. It must therefore unavoidably be acknowledged, that 'tis no Consequence to say, because a Man sins in acting against the Motions of an erroneous Conscience, therefore he does well in following and obeying them.

I have carefully avoided to say, that an erroneous Conscience *oblige*s, or does *not oblige*; knowing that 'tis scarce possible to apply this Term to the present Subject, without creating Difficulties in the Mind of the Reader: For indeed, should it be said that such a Conscience has the power of obliging, it would immediately be inferr'd, that to comply with its Suggestions was not sinful: For how is it probable, that a Man should commit Sin, in doing that which he is obliged to do? On the other hand, should it be said, that it did not oblige, some would hence conclude, that it could never be sinful to act contrary to it: For how should a Man sin in not following the Dictates of a Conscience which he is under no Obligation to obey?

That I might not raise these Difficulties, I have abstained from that Term, and have chosen to make use of others which have not the same untoward Effect. Some perhaps will be of Opinion, that it had been better to have propos'd the Difficulties, and to have solv'd them; and in particular, will desire to know, what Answer is to be returned, to a Man who shall urge the following Dilemma: Either an erroneous Conscience obliges, or it does not oblige; if it obliges, we cannot sin in doing what it enjoins; if it does not oblige, we may very innocently act against its Injunctions. I



I reply, That the Party who makes this Objection, should be ask'd What he means by the Word *oblige*? If 'tis the putting a Man into such a State, as that while he continues under it, all that he does is Sinful; in this Sense we may truly affirm, that an erroneous Conscience does oblige. But hence it can never follow, that a Man Sins not in obeying the Motions of this Conscience; it rather follows, that he necessarily Sins.

If to oblige, is to authorize the doing of any thing, by conferring a Power and Right, 'tis certain that an erroneous Conscience does not oblige. But hence it does by no means follow, that a Man may innocently proceed against its Motions; because by so doing he would demonstrate, that he made no scruple of offending God; which cannot be otherwise than Criminal.

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C H A P. IX.

*An Objection answered. Whether a State of Perplexity be possible.*

IT is certain, therefore, that a Man may Sin, both in following the Suggestions of a deceived Conscience, and in disobeying them. But some will say, if this be so, then the State of *Perplexity*, which Divines are wont to represent as impossible, will not only be possible, but frequent and common. It is, when a Man finds himself so pressed by two contrary Obligations, that let him take  
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which side he will, he must Sin. And does not this Case happen every Day, supposing what I have but now delivered to be true?

Let us imagine the Error which possesses the Conscience to consist in esteeming such an Action to be necessary, which in reality, and according to the Law of God is Sinful: For Instance, Let us suppose a Papist, who believes it to be a Sin not to worship the *Host*. What Course shall he take? If he follows the Motions of his Conscience, he transgresses the Law of God, which forbids him to pay Adoration to a Creature. If he refuses, or does but neglect this Action, he likewise Sins, in disobeying his Conscience; And is not this what we term a State of Perplexity?

I answer, That as to this perplex'd Estate, Divines have two very different Ideas of it. Some take it for such an uneasiness of Mind, under which a Man knows not which way to turn, and is afraid of sinning on either side; whether this Fear be just and rational, or whether it be groundless, and proceed only from want of Information. Others by Perplexity understand such an Estate; in which a Man cannot determine, or take either side without Sin, whether he is sensible of it or not.

Perplexity, taken in the former Sense, is very common; but it always arises from the Error of the Party, in judging that to be sinful which is not so, as I hope to make appear hereafter. But tho' I look on this Sense to be the more Natural, yet the Objection here recited is built on the latter Sense.

Sense. And in this latter Sense, Perplexity is indeed impossible as the Objection supposes. For if it were thus possible, the Consequence must be, that Sin would become absolutely, and in all respects inevitable, which it never can be: Nay, it would become inevitable not only in Fact, but in Law and Right. The Party would be under an Obligation of committing it, which is absurd and ridiculous.

So that there is always a Medium between the two Extremes, with which at any time we find our selves straitned, and by taking this middle Course we may avoid them both. For Instance, In the Case which the Objection proposes, the Party might undeceive himself, and come to the knowledge of the Truth; for I take it for granted, that the Error is not invincible, or involuntary: Were it so, the Action which proceeds from it could not be sinful; and this alone would overturn the Objection.

But if the Error be neither invincible, nor involuntary, the Party may extricate himself from it, and, by consequence, is not properly *perplex'd*. For, as I observed before, a Man is then only in a State of Perplexity, when he finds himself so press'd by two contrary Obligations, that he cannot satisfy the one, without being deficient in the other. But in the Case now supposed, one of the Obligations being grounded on Error, may be defeated, and, consequently, will press no longer, if the Party shall rescue himself from this Error, and shall open his Eyes to the Truth.

This



This is very easie to be said (as some perhaps may still object,) but not so easie to be practis'd; for how shall a Man free himself, if he does not so much as know that he's in a Mistake? Indeed, he knows it in the first kind of Perplexity here describ'd, because he sees two contrary Obligations, and yet is at a loss which to follow; but he does not know it in the second kind of Perplexity. For under this, he proceeds *bona fide*, as his Error leads him. And how is it possible he should rid himself of an Error which he takes for Truth and Certainty?

I answer, that this Objection is capable of two meanings: Either it may signifie, that in the Case propos'd 'tis very difficult for the Party to be undeceiv'd; or it may signifie, that this is not only difficult but impossible.

If it be meant in the latter sense, it is a Mistake; for 'tis never impossible to set our selves right, and to obtain the Knowledge of a Truth, of which, before, we were Ignorant. This which happens on so many Occasions, will be easily confessed to be possible.

If it be meant in the former Sense, it affirms nothing at all: For Perplexity does not consist in such a distraction between two interfering Obligations, as that 'tis difficult to find a Medium, or an Expedient of violating neither; but it supposes, that there is not only a difficulty, but even an impossibility of finding such a Medium, or Expedient: Which not being so, the Objection vanishes of its own accord.

CHAP.

## C H A P. X.

*Which of the two is the greatest Sinner, he that acts against the Motions of an erroneous Conscience, or he that acts in conformity to them.*

**T**HOUGH this Question may seem rather curious than necessary, yet because it is sometimes of real use, I shall not scruple to stay one Moment upon the Consideration of it.

I have already evinc'd, that when the Conscience is engaged in some certain Errors, a Man Sins either in acting against its Suggestions, or in conforming to them. The Question is, Which of these two Sins is the more heinous?

The Author of the *Philosophical Commentary* seems to maintain, that the first is always so. But it is evident, in my Opinion, that this cannot be a general Rule: It must be confess'd, that what he says does indeed happen in some Cases: Thus, for Instance, none will dispute but that a Papist, who believing Transubstantiation, should apply the Consecrated *Host* to those horrid and abominable Uses which are mention'd by some Modern Authors, but which I dare not so much as describe, would Sin in a far more grievous manner, than another Papist, who should pray to God for the Souls in Purgatory: Nay, I readily acknowledge, that these two Sins would bear no manner of Proportion to each other.

But

But then, in another Case, who will pretend that the *Jews* did not commit a greater Sin beyond all Comparison, in crucifying our Saviour, than they could have committed by transgressing the Traditions of their Fathers; as, for Instance, by using the same Knife in cutting Meat and Cheese?

It is not therefore absolutely true, that the Sins of one of these Orders are always greater than those of the other : Sometimes they are, and at other times they are not. But some will say, may we not find out a certain Rule, which shall precisely inform us in what Cases it thus happens? I take this to be very difficult; because, indeed, the vitiousness of Actions depends on many particular Circumstances, which may be so differently combined, that they cannot well be brought under any settled Rule and Standard.

The Casuists who have handled this Question, as *Vasquez*, *Sanchez*, *Baldelli*, and some others, reply, that the whole matter depends on the weight and importance of the two Precepts, one of which is really violated, and the other supposed to be violated. They say, for Example, that he who knowing the Precept against an officious Lie to oblige only under the pain of a Venial Sin, shall lie to save the Life of his Neighbour, Sins only venially : Whereas, on the other side, he, who believed falsely, that an officious Lie was innocent and allowable, would Sin mortally, should he refuse to lie on the same account; because he is oblig'd under the pain of a mortal Sin to preserve his Neighbours Life, and to use all innocent endeavours for that purpose.

But



But now, besides that this Rule is built upon a Distinction which we can by no means admit of, in the Sense in which it is understood by these Authors, (as I have shewn in another Work) it cannot fully satisfy the expectation of the Readers; for what if the Sin be Venial, or Mortal both ways?

For my own part, I am perswaded, that there can be no infallible Rule establish'd in this matter. My reason is, because the good and evil, of our Actions does not only depend on these two Circumstances, the erring or not erring, as to Law and Justice, the following, or not following the Dictates of Conscience. It depends likewise upon many others, some of which may be of such a Nature as to aggravate more than these two, which alone are consider'd.

All that could reasonably be desired is, that we would determine which of these Sins is the greater in it self, and independently from all other Circumstances; either that Contempt which is shewn to the Suggestions of Conscience, and even to the Authority of God, by him who does an Action with a false Opinion of its being forbidden; or that negligence which appears in the Conduct of him, who having not used sufficient care to inform himself of his Duty, is fallen into such an Error as makes him judge an evil, or indifferent Action to be good.

But I cannot think even this Decision to be possible; because either of these two Sins may be smaller or greater, almost to infinite degrees. The greatness of the first depends chiefly on the Motive by which the Party

is induced thus to act against his Conscience: The more pressing this Motive is in it self, the less the Sin in proportion; and, on the contrary, the Sin is the more heinous, as the Motive is less considerable.

It likewise depends on the Opinion which the Party has of the greatness of the Sin; for the more heinous he judges it to be, the more abominable it is for him to venture on the Commission.

The Greatness of the Second depends on several different things. As, first, on the easiness or difficulty of obtaining Information. Secondly, on the Efforts which the Party has made, or has not made, to this purpose. Thirdly, on the Importance of the Subject about which he ought to inform himself. Fourthly, on the Knowledge, or Sense, which he has of this importance.

Since these Considerations, with others the like, which might be added, may extremely diversifie these two Sins, and almost infinitely enhance or abate the Evil adherent to them, it is manifest, that no Rule can be assigned which shall enable us to pronounce with certitude of their comparative Enormity.

So that the only just and proper Question, would be to ask, Which of the two, either this Negligence, or this Contempt, considered in their kind, and abstracting from all things else, is the more criminal? The Question thus proposed may, I think, be easily resolved: The Contempt is the greater Sin; it is a Sin of Commission: It is more deliberate than the Neglect. The Affront  
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it offers to God is more direct and formal : And thus it appears to have somewhat more heinous and aggravating in its Nature.

But after all, to say this and no more, is to say very little ; because, as I have already observed, the greatness of Sins actually committed depends much less on this abstracted Consideration, than it does on the particular Circumstances with which the Action is attended.

## C H A P. XI.

*The Conscience ought to judge peremptorily, and without Hesitation.*

What has been offer'd may suffice as to the first Condition required in making a *Good Judgment*. It's time to pass on to the Second, which is of very great importance : This consists in judging peremptorily or decisively, without hesitation or reserve : Take away this second Condition, and the first will appear defective. Let us suppose an Action to be lawful and innocent in it self : Let us suppose a Man not to know that it is so, and yet to venture upon it. Howsoever innocent this Action may be in its own Nature, it is criminal to the Party, because he does it without assurance, and under suspense. St. Paul has instructed us in this Maxim: *Let every Man, (says he) be fully* Rom. xiv. *persuaded in his own Mind.* And a little after, 5. *He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because* Vers. 23. *he*



*he eateth not of Faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is Sin.*

We are, therefore, by no means to proceed to Action while we doubt of the Goodness, or at least, while we doubt of the Innocence of what is to be done. We ought to have a certain Assurance in this respect; but then what kind of Certainty is here requir'd? This is a Point which it highly concerns us to adjust, and we cannot do it with too much care and exactness.

There are several Species of Certainty: There is the Certainty of Divine Faith, the Certainty of Human Faith, Physical Certainty, and Metaphysical. The Certainty of Divine Faith is that which we have of such things as we know God has revealed. The Certainty of Human Faith is, that which arises from the uniform testimony of so many unsuspected Persons, that 'tis alike impossible these Persons should be deceived themselves, or should have an intention of deceiving us. 'Tis thus, that Men who have never been in *France*, or *Italy*, are assured that in those Countries there are two such Cities as *Paris* and *Rome*. Physical Certainty is that which arises from the Reports of Sense; and thus I am assur'd that I see, or feel. Metaphysical Certainty belongs to things of the highest Evidence; such as the following Truths, *It is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be at the same time: I think; therefore, I exist.*

'Tis agreed, that we are not to look for Metaphysical Certainty in Moral things; the Subject is not capable of it. Physical Certainty

tainty we may have as to some matters of Fact; but besides, that we cannot have it as to all, nor even the greatest part of those which are necessary to be known, 'tis impossible to obtain this in regard to matters of Law, upon which, notwithstanding the Doubts and Questions of Conscience usually turn. I affirm the same of Human Faith: this may assure us of a small number of Facts, but not of very many, much less of all; and then as to Law and Equity, it is wholly unconcerned.

Lastly, we have the Certainty of Divine Faith, with respect to some General Truths; as, for Instance, That 'tis our Duty to love God and our Neighbour; that lying and stealing, Murther and Adultery, are criminal Actions: But 'tis very rarely that we have it in respect of what we ought to do on any particular occasion, because the Circumstances may change the Nature of Actions, and what is lawful at one conjuncture, may be sinful at another. Thus God having not revealed to us how we ought to proceed in each Occurency, 'tis plain we have not always that Certainty which is inseparable from Divine Faith.

So that, were there only these four Species of Certainty, it would seldom happen that we could have any one of them, and, consequently, that we could act; which must throw us into a continual Perplexity. For which reason, besides the four here mention'd, a fifth Species has been acknowledg'd, which we may term *Moral*, taking this Word in another Sense than when applied to that

Species of Certainty which I call Human Faith.

Tr.i. c. 3. I confess it is differently explain'd by some Authors: Thus, for Instance, *Antoninus of Florence*, and *M. Genet*, by whom he is cited, affirm, that *Moral Certainty does not depend upon Evident and Demonstrative Knowledge, but only upon such as is probable, and which inclines us to embrace one Opinion rather than the contrary.* But this Explication confounds Probability with Certainty, and may likewise produce very terrible Consequences, as I hope to evince in the proper place.

For my own part, I believe that the Moral Certainty, which is sufficient in order to our acting wisely and innocently, requires two things. First, That we have no Reason or Argument on the other side, or, at least, none but such the weakness and falsity of which we plainly discern. Secondly, That the Persuasion which we embrace be grounded upon solid Reasons, and such as we think do not admit of any probable Objection.

The first of these Considerations is necessary. For if there be Reasons on the other side which appear considerable, and about which we are not fully satisfied, we may fear that they are good and solid, and, consequently, that we are in the wrong if we do not yield to them; which is inconsistent with the Notion of Certainty. But when we see no reason on the opposite side, or when perceiving any one, we at the same time discern that it is built on a false, or uncertain Foundation, we are justly confirmed beyond suspicion or doubt.

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I affirm the second Condition to be no less necessary. If the Reasons which we have to be perswaded of any thing absolutely determine the Mind, if we see nothing that defeats, or even that impairs and weakens them, tho' otherwise they are not demonstrative, and tho', strictly speaking, it is not impossible but they may have some defect which we cannot discover, and of which we entertain not the least suspicion; in this Case we lay aside all Doubt, and are in possession of that Species of Certainty which is termed Moral, and which tho' inferior indeed to the four above-mention'd, yet is the utmost we can obtain, in regard to an infinite multitude of Questions.

For Example, a Man is accused of committing a Murther: It appears that some Days before the Commission, the Accused had a Quarrel with the Deceas'd: Two unexceptionable Witnesses depose, that they saw him do the Fact: He pleads Guilty; and we have not the least suspicion to the contrary. Is there not good reason that this Fact should pass for certain? Yet is it not reducible to any one of the four Species of Certainty first recited, and, absolutely speaking, it may be false? 'Tis very possible, the Accused Person may be innocent, he may be weary of Life, and in the number of those whom the Civil Law styles *Perire volentes*, the Witnesses may depose falsely, &c. So that our Certainty, in this Case, is not total and perfect; yet it is sufficient to exclude all Doubt, and the wisest of Men would desire no more on the present Occasion.

But here, some will be sure to say, that this is indeed enough in matters of Fact, and in all those things the certain knowledge of which is absolutely impossible; but that 'tis by no means so with regard to the Divine Law, whether Natural, or Positive, if sufficiently revealed. For, since I confess that this Certainty does not exclude all possibility of the contrary; let it be supposed that what we look upon as certain, is false, and that the Action which we doubt not to pronounce innocent, is really sinful: This Sin shall be imputed to us; because the Ignorance whence it springs is not involuntary or insuperable. And if the Certainty of which we are speaking leaves room for Imputation, who can pretend, that, in these respects it is sufficient?

I have no other Reply to make to this Objection, than what I formerly made to one of the same Nature. I confess that this Certainty is not sufficient in an absolute Sense. I confess that God might impute to us as sinful, the Actions which we perform in the bare virtue of it; but since the Divine Mercy and Goodness is infinite beyond all Conception, and since we are under, if not an absolute impossibility, yet at least an extreme difficulty of obtaining any higher assurance in a multitude of Cases, we have reason to believe that God will accept of this, and will demand nothing farther of us.

I say, I am not inclined to think, that God will lay this defect to our Charge, whatever it be; and yet should he do so, which I will not here dispute, I look upon it as one of the  
least

least of those Sins from which the holiest Persons are not exempted, and the remission of which is always obtain'd by a General Repentance.

However, I am very sensible that the matter which I have endeavour'd to illustrate in this Chapter is of the utmost nicety and tenderness. Nay, I do not question but that the greatest part of my Readers will be dissatisfied with what I have offer'd upon it. I am perswaded, that some will blame me for requiring too much Certainty, and others for taking up with too little. And being aware of this Event, I would have done as most Authors do, I would have passed over the Difficulty as unobserv'd, an Artifice which perhaps very few Persons might have discovered; I say, I would have taken such a Course if I had thought I could honestly do it, and if what I have here delivered had not appeared to me absolutely necessary, for the clearing up of the Subject, and as an Introduction to what I shall propose hereafter.

I have only one Request to make to each Order of Readers, who shall disapprove of what I have said in this Chapter. I desire those who may think that I insist upon too great Certainty, to suspend their Judgment till they have read what I shall offer on the Subject of Probability, where they will find, that this alone cannot afford us sufficient Grounds to act with a safe Conscience.

And as for those who may object, that I am contented with too little Certainty, I desire them to inform me how 'tis possible to  
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have more, in respect of all the Questions which Conscience is engaged to decide. Let them make the Experiment upon any one of these Questions, as, on that, for instance, which relates to the precise Quantity of Alms in all the several junctures arising from the different Combinations of the particular degree of Necessity, as well in the Party to be relieved, as in other Poor who may want what he receives, and of Wealth, or other means of Assistance, in the Giver. If they apply themselves carefully to determine this Case in its full extent, and to evince it with a greater degree of Certainty than what I require, I hope they will acknowledge, that if I am mistaken in the Point, my mistake has some title to their Favour.

I am obliged to reply to another Objection which may be urged against me. In stating the Nature of Certainty, I have made it requisite, not that the Reasons should be good and solid in themselves, but that they should appear so to us. Many will be offended at this; because indeed the falsest Reasons appear solid to some Capacities, for want of Penetration and Light. And therefore, instead of Reasons which appear solid, they would have me insist upon such as are really so.

But I have two things to return in Answer. First, That to require such Reasons as are truly substantial, is to pretend to decide the Question, but to leave it wholly undetermin'd. For how shall he to whom a Reason appears strong and convincing, discover whether it be properly so in it self?

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We must, therefore, be satisfied with things as they appear to us: but I add, in the second place, that when I speak of that which appears to us, I do not mean that which appears at first sight, or that which appears to a Mind possessed with Prejudice and Error; I mean that which appears to a Man who has done all that he was able, and all that he was bound to do, for his own Information. So that the Judgment which we ought to make of this Certainty depends much less on that impression which the Reasons and Arguments make upon our Mind, than on that Testimony which the Mind gives it self, of having faithfully and diligently examin'd them, and having omitted no means of Instruction which were in its own Power.

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## C H A P. XII.

*What we are to do, when we cannot come to a Certainty. Six Conditions under which we may find our selves.*

THose few who will admit what I have said in the last Chapter, and will believe that precise degree of Certainty which I have there describ'd to be sufficient, will yet object one thing, which, I confess, is very true. It is, that we cannot always obtain this Certainty which I require. They will ask, therefore, How we are to proceed, in defect

fect of it; which is highly worth our Consideration.

In order to this, it must be observ'd, that when any Question is put to us, whether by others, or by our selves, there are Six different States in which we may find our selves, as to the giving an Answer; a State of Ignorance, of Doubt, of Suspicion, of Opinion, of Scruple, and of Certainty.

We are in *Ignorance*, not only when the Question escapes our apprehension, and when the Terms of which it is compos'd excite no Idea in our Mind; but likewise when understanding the Question, we see nothing that can determine, or encline us either way. Thus if we should be ask'd, Whether the Number of Angels is even or odd? Whether the Meadows in *Japan* will produce more or fewer Blades of Grass this Year than the last? Whether he who, at the beginning of the present Month was Emperor of *China*, be now living or dead, &c. The only Answer we would give in such a Case is, That we know nothing of it.

*Doubt* is nothing else but a suspension of the Mind, not daring to determine it self; either because the Reasons *Pro* and *Con* appear to it of equal Force, or because tho' there is some inequality, yet this is not thought great enough to determine it, or, lastly, because it does not find its self sufficiently inform'd, and therefore believes, that there are Reasons on both sides which it is unacquainted with, and which may be more considerable than those which offer themselves to its Discovery.

*Suspicion*



*Suspicion* takes place, first, when not seeing any solid Reason on either side, we have some slight Conjecture in favour of one, but such as we dare not rely upon, and therefore afford it very little regard. Secondly, When the Arguments *Pro* and *Con* seem almost upon an equality, and yet there is some little advantage one way more than the other.

By *Opinion* we mean the determinate Assent of our Mind to a thing proposed, which appears to be grounded on very cogent and probable Arguments, but such as are not demonstrative. We yield, in this Case, yet we do not think the contrary to be impossible; nor are we without all fear of being Mistaken.

We are in a *Scruple*, when having good and solid Reasons to determine us, we are yet hindred and molested by some petty Considerations, which deserve not our notice, and which we ought rather to despise.

Lastly, *Certainty* is, when the Mind has a full Conviction of the Truth of the Judgment which it pronounces.

I have nothing farther to offer, as to *Certainty* and *Ignorance*. *Suspicion* is not a Subject worth our particular Enquiry: We may make the same Judgment of that as of *Doubt*, from which it differs little, if it be not a Species of it. So that the whole Question is reduc'd to *Doubt*, *Opinion* and *Scruple*, which we are now distinctly and throughly to consider.

## C H A P. XIII.

*Of Scruples. How they differ from tenderness of Conscience. What Course we are to take to be delivered from them.*

**I** Begin with the Case of Scruples, as well because I have but little to say upon it, as because of the three Estates or Conditions which I am to examine, this approaches the nearest to the Certainty but now mention'd; in a Word, it is as follows.

It frequently happens that we have solid and convincing Reasons to perswade us that an Action is good, or, however, that it is innocent. And yet we dare not venture upon it, or at least, we do it with trembling and diffidence, because we fear it may, in some respect be criminal; to which fear we are disposed by some slight and miserable Surmises which deserved not the least Consideration. The Reasons which produce this Apprehension, or the Apprehension excited by these Reasons, or both together, compose that which usually passes under the Name of *Scruple*.

Scruples proceed commonly, either from a defect of Knowledge, or an excess of Timidity: Very often they are the Effects of Constitution, and temperament of Body; Melancholy, in particular, is too fruitful a Mother of them.

Hence it appears, That Scruples are very different things, from that which we style tenderness of Conscience. Scrupulosity is no more than a certain weakness of the Soul, causing

sing the slightest Reasons to strike upon it, and to fix an Impression. Tenderneſs of Conſcience is of quite another Nature.

This latter is concern'd not about the Reasons which diſſuade, but about the Evil which appears in the Action we decline. If this Evil be great and notorious, as in the more heinous Sins, a Conſcience which has ſcarce any degree of tenderneſs will ſtart at it. When the Evil is but ſmall, then this tenderneſs I am ſpeaking of moves us to avoid it. We ſee, then, a tender Conſcience is that which cannot bear the leaſt Inſtance of Sin, which flies and deteſts all appearance of Evil.

Whence it is likewise evident, that thoſe Sins which wound a tender Conſcience, are Sins in reality; whereas, thoſe which excite Scruples, are only Sins in Imagination, or innocent Actions unaccountably miſtaken for Crimes.

Tenderneſs of Conſcience is highly juſt and reaſonable: For tho' the Sins which grieve and offend it are but ſmall, in compariſon with thoſe which we term enormous, yet they are ſtill great in themſelves, as diſpleaſing God, whoſe Majeſty is infinite and incomprehenſible; and as contrary to that Purity and Perfection which the Honour we have in being the Sons of God, and Heirs of his Kingdom, engages us to follow after: Whereas Scruples, on the other ſide, are moſt unjuſt and unreaſonable; becauſe they incline us to eſteem that as ſinful, which is ever conſiſtent with the pureſt Innocence.

All Divines are unanimous, That when a Man is diſturbed with Scruples, he ought to deſpiſe



despise them, and utterly to banish them from his Mind. The Advice is good and solid ; yet, before it be put in practice, one Consideration ought to be had, which is of the last Importance ; and that is, the Party ought to be well assur'd, that what he despises is a Scruple : For if, by Misfortune, it should prove a real and just Argument, he would commit a very grievous Sin in despising it, and instead of ridding his Mind of a Scruple, would voluntarily extinguish the Light of his own Conscience.

This is what happens but too frequently in the World. We every Day meet with those who, upon the proposal of such Truths as are certain and constant in themselves, but opposite to their Lusts or evil Habits, resolve never to think on them, and make this excuse to themselves, or to others, that they are unwilling to fill their Minds with Scruples, and to disquiet themselves without Reason or Foundation.

What can be conceiv'd more unjust, or more imprudent, than this way of Proceeding? The most clear and indisputable Truths of the Gospel shall thus pass for trivial Scruples, which Men ought to despise. Under the pretence, that these Truths render the Parties uneasy, as Scruples do those who labour with them ; they may imagine that they may confound these two kinds, which have only this effect in common, and are so very different in all other Regards.

A Scruple is a light and feeble, a petty and contemptible Reason ; but what these Persons miscall by the Name of Scruple, and  
treat

treat it accordingly, is great and considerable, of very high Importance, and worthy of all deference and respect : And therefore, to condemn the Latter is not to rid our selves of Scruples, but 'tis to incur wilful Blindness ; it is to stifle the Voice of Conscience, and to plunge our selves into that state of Spiritual Obduration, which is the last degree of the Soul's Death in this World, and the deepest Abyss into which it can fall on this side Hell.

Therefore, before we proceed to slight any thing as a Scruple, we ought to be well assured, that 'tis really such. But how is it possible for us to be thus assured ? *Layman*, a celebrated Casuist, has given us a Rule, by which he pretends, that we may distinguish whatever truly falls under this Name. It is, that we are only to consider, whether we dislike and condemn that in others, which we cannot excuse in our selves. He says, Scrupulous Persons are only severe upon themselves, and only indulgent towards their Neighbours ; whence they esteem that to be innocent in the Actions of other Men, which they look upon as criminal in their own.

But I cannot approve of this Rule : First, Because it is altogether as unusual, as Scruples are common. Nothing can be more frequent than these vain Apprehensions : Whereas, on the contrary, nothing is more rare, than to allow in others what we condemn in our selves. Most Men, or rather all, have a double Notion of Morality, the one strict, the other loose : They judge of their Neighbours Conduct by the Former, and of their

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own by the Latter : And consequently, were the Rule here propos'd just and certain, yet it could on very few Occasions be useful and serviceable.

What I have now observ'd has so much the less Difficulty, as it is usual for us to meet with Persons who are constantly Scrupulous, and who condemn alike in themselves and others, many things that are very innocent. Every Day will furnish us with such Examples : And therefore, the said Casuist's Rule could never inform these Persons, what was truly a Scruple, and what was not.

I add in the third place, that 'tis very possible, a good natur'd Person may carry his Indulgence too far, and approve in others what is really blameable. Upon this Supposition, which cannot be denied me, the said good-natur'd Person must esteem that in himself to be but a vain Scruple, which is indeed his just Apprehension and fear of Sin, in doing what is unlawful. Thus the Rule by which he was govern'd would prove false; a sufficient Evidence that it is not infallible.

*Vasquez, Azor, Sanches*, and many others, give us a second Rule, which is no better than the first. They say, that we ought to look upon every thing as innocent which is not evidently sinful ; and by Consequence, that all Fears and Suspicions against the Lawfulness of any Action which are not grounded upon convincing and demonstrative Reasons are to be consider'd as idle Scruples, and to be despised accordingly.

Nothing can be more false, or rather more pernicious and fatal, that this Rule ; and I question,



question, whether amongst all the Abominations of the Casuists, there be any one more detestable; tho' I dont remember that they have been ever censur'd for it.

It may very easily happen, or to speak properly, it happens every Day, that an Action may be sinful, and yet not only illiterate Persons, but even learned Professors, may have no convincing Reason to condemn it. What then would be the Consequence, if not only the best inform'd, but even the most ignorant of Mankind, abandon'd themselves without remorse, to every thing that did not seem apparently Criminal? Into what Excesses of Vice and Sin must they continually be transported?

I believe, therefore, that there is no other certain Mark and Character which distinguishes meer Scruples from just Apprehensions, besides the Injustice of the Former, and the Justice of the Latter. I believe there is no other way of discerning between them, but to examine their Grounds and Reasons; at least, this is the only way that I know of.

And it comes recommended with a particular Advantage, in that 'tis very proper not only to give us a right Understanding of our Scruples, but to assist us in curing, and in despising them: For how is it possible we should either be content to retain them, or should forbear to scorn and deride them, had we but a distinct view of their Vanity and Falshood, which upon such an Examination we should have? So that we have no other care to take, and are by no means obliged to follow the Directions of

the *Douay* Professor, *Platelinus*, who advises those who are troubled with Scruples, to accustom themselves to the acting upon such Principles or Opinions, as give them the most Liberty. A very fatal and terrible Counsel is this, and far different from the Command of our Saviour: *Enter ye in at the straight Gate.*

## C H A P. XIV.

### *Of Opinion.*

**B***Y Opinion* I understand that act of our Mind, by which we pronounce determinately on the Truth or Falshood of a Proposition, affirming or denying it within our selves; yet not after such a manner, as that we esteem the contrary to be impossible, or that we are wholly exempt from all fear of being mistaken.

And this happens, when the Reasons that determine us one way rather, than the other, appear sufficiently cogent for that purpose, but yet are not absolutely convincing.

So that the difference between Doubt and Opinion, is, that under the Former we do not pronounce upon the Truth or Falshood of the Proposition before us, but the Mind continues undetermin'd, and in suspense; whereas in Opinion, the Mind does indeed determine it self, tho' this Determination be not so full and so absolute, as in Science, which is the inseparable attendant of Certainty.

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This kind of Judgment tends very little to the Credit and Honour of him that pronounces it. It is a manifest Indication of his Rashness, his Ignorance, and his Idleness. The Rashness is visible ; because, as I have already observ'd, the Rules of Prudence require, that we should never pronounce without Evidence.

Nor is our Ignorance less notorious in this Proceeding ; because a little more Light and Knowledge would make us declare after another manner : For either what we pronounce is true, or 'tis false : If it be true, we should thus obtain a more distinct Perception of its Truth, and the Judgment we gave of it would be accompanied with Certainty : If it be false, we should thus discern and apprehend its Falshood, and the Judgment we gave of it would be contrary to what we give at present.

But these two Defaults, being almost inevitable to humane Nature, are in some measure tolerable ; and, as I have formerly intimated, God of his abundant Mercy will not lay them to our Charge. We cannot speak so favourably of some others, which for the most part go along with them : For setting aside all those Judgments which we pass on Matters of Fact, if we confine our Discourse to those only which have for their Object the Divine Law, Natural, or Positive sufficiently reveal'd ; Ignorance, which is essential to Opinion, will appear in all these Instances, to be attended with Idleness ; because, as I have observ'd on another Occasion in all Matters of this kind, our Ignorance is either di-

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rectly or indirectly wilful, and proceeds from our want of care to be duly inform'd.

Thus Opinion, whether true or false, is always blameable, in respect of the Divine Law; and in my Judgment, nothing ought more to humble and mortify us, than this undeniable Proof, not only of our Ignorance, but of our Negligence.

Besides these Failings, which are perpetual, there are others which we must own to be too frequent.

It is common to see, that Men not only are deficient in doing all that they were able, and were bound to do, for their own Instruction, but that they have not taken one step towards this Design, absolutely waving and slighting the Consideration of it.

It is common to see, that Men do not only neglect to inform themselves before-hand, but that in pronouncing upon any occasional Action, they proceed with the most insufferable Rashness, declaring it to be Good or Evil, without examining the Question, and without taking such Precautions as are necessary to secure them from being deceiv'd.

It is common to see, that they who do use any Precaution in this behalf, yet take up with very little, and such as is incomparably inferior to that which they use in their temporal Affairs, of the smallest Moment or Concern.

It is common to see, that Men determine themselves by the Reasons which appear on the one side, without giving the least Attention to those that are suggested on the other ;

other; as if a Judge should pass a definitive Sentence upon hearing one Party only.

Or if they do afford any Attention to the Reasons on the opposite side, it happens but too frequently, that they do not attend to them all, they consider only the lightest and most trivial, shutting their Eyes against those which are of the greatest force and weight.

And especially it is common to see, that Men suffer themselves to be imposed upon by such Reasons, as are not only void of all solid Strength, but the Weakness and Falshood of which they might easily discern, if they would take the least trouble of enquiring about them.

Nor is it less common to see, that Men establish as the Rule of their Judgments, certain pre-conceiv'd Opinions, which indeed are very customary, and very widely diffused; but at the same time are destitute of all Foundation, and directly repugnant to the Truth.

Lastly, It is common to see, that Interest and Passion disturb our Spirit, and engage us to pronounce, not as the Eternal Laws of Truth demand, but as the Heart desires by some inward Motion, which is sometimes more sensible, sometimes more obscure, but always alike unjust and unreasonable, and always more powerful, and more efficacious than it ought to be.

If we subtract from the gross of our Opinions, whether true or false, all those which do not arise from one or other of these Defects, I believe there will scarce one be left behind: I speak of such only as have the Di-

vine Law for their Object. There are very few in which we may not observe, I don't say one of these Faults, but the greatest part of them, or at least several of them in Conjunction.

Which being granted, What can be more unjust than to pretend, that an Opinion of this kind is a sufficient Plea for all the evil Action to which it betrays us? If such an Opinion be false, as very easily it may, 'tis impossible it should serve us for an Apology; on the one side, because, as I have shewn in one of the preceding Chapters, no Error which is contrary to the Divine Law, Natural, or Positive sufficiently reveal'd, can excuse; and on the other side, because 'tis unconceivable, that such Errors as we fall into by any one of those Neglects, which I have but now reckon'd up, should ever be innocent.

Prov. xiv.  
12.

If to hinder any Action from being sinful, we need only imagine it to be otherwise, nothing would be more false than what *Solomon* has told us, *There is a way which seemeth right to a Man, but the end thereof are the ways of Death.* For then to judge probably that our Way was right, would be enough to render it sure and infallible.

John xvi.  
2.

If whatever we conceiv'd to be good and commendable, we might therefore innocently perform, the Action of those who put to Death the Apostles of our Saviour, could not be censur'd as criminal, because He himself declares in his Gospel, *Whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.*

IF



If to fancy, that what we do is well-pleasing to God, were enough to secure us from being punish'd for it, the Idolaters would be in a safe Condition ; for they look on the monstrous Rights of their own Worship, as the Acts of the purest and most holy Religion in the World.

I conclude from the whole, That our Opinions ought never to be the Rules of our Conduct ; at least with regard to Law. It is requisite we should be furnish'd with Certainty for this purpose : But if Certainty is not to be had, and we can arrive no higher than to a bare Probability, we ought here to proceed as in Cases of Doubt, and to follow not what is most likely, but what is most safe. This I shall endeavour to illustrate in the following Chapters : But since no Subject is of greater Importance, and yet none admits of more Disputes, I must crave the Reader's Pardon, if I am somewhat large in the Prosecution of it.

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## C H A P. XV.

*What we are to do in the Case of Doubt. We are to seek for Satisfaction. Whether private Persons ought absolutely to follow the Judgment of their Spiritual Guides?*

**I**T is agreed, That when we are in Doubt concerning any Action which offers it self, whether it be Good or Evil, allow'd or forbidden, we should endeavour to obtain Assurance

Assurance and Satisfaction. This is undeniably evident. 'Tis agreed farther, That in order to the obtaining of such Assurance, and to the inlightning of our Judgment, we ought to implore the Divine Assistance, we ought to weigh and examine the Question, we ought to consult with Men of Understanding and Experience ; all this is generally suppos'd to be compriz'd in the Words of

Mat. vii. 7.

our Saviour, *Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.* There is only some little Difficulty made as to the third of these Means ; and it may not be improper to spend a Moment upon it, before we proceed to other parts of the main Question.

I say, therefore, in the first place, That nothing is more Natural, than to call in the Help of others, when we find a Work too hard for our own single Strength : Particularly, it is agreeable to Reason and good Sense, That when we are not Masters of so much Knowledge as is necessary for the clear and solid Determination of a Point before us, we should apply, for Direction, to better Lights. This is the Course which we take every Day in our temporal Affairs ; and why should it seem less proper in our Spiritual ?

As, therefore, in Points of Law, Men have recourse to the Learned of that Profession, as they consult the Physicians about their Health, and as they take the Opinion even of the meanest Artisan in the Business of his particular Art ; so it is Natural for them in all Doubts of Conscience, to apply to Di-  
vines,

vines, especially to their own Pastors: For may it not well be presum'd, that this Pastor, this Divine, whose Profession obliges him to the peculiar study of Christian Morality, should more distinctly apprehend the Rules and Maxims of it, than a private Person, whose Enquiries into it are, for the most part, very slight and imperfect?

Besides, this Proceeding is highly agreeable to that Order which God has establish'd in his Church. The *Jews* were commanded, when any Matter should be too hard for them, in respect of the Observation of God's Law, to repair to the Priests the *Levites*, and to the Judges that should be in those Days, and to perform exactly whatever they should declare: Which is the Foundation of the Prophet *Malachy's* Assertion, *The Priests Lips should keep Knowledge, and they should seek the Law at his Mouth; for he is the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts.* And to the same purpose, St. Paul acquaints the *Ephesians*, that God hath given his Church, *some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers,----- that we henceforth be no more Children tossed to and fro,----- but speaking the Truth in Love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the Head.* Deut. xvii. Mal. ii. 2. Eph. iv. 11, 14, 15.

And here 'tis in vain to urge, That every Man ought to have such a measure of Knowledge as is sufficient for the Conduct of his own Life. This, I confess, ought to be; or at least, it were much to be wish'd: But can we ever hope to see it thus? Did it ever happen in time past? Or, is there any appearance of its happening in time to come?

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Does not the Number of the Ignorant, in all Times and Places, exceed that of the Learned and Knowing ? And do not the most Learned every Day encounter such Difficulties, as it costs them some trouble to assail ?

I cannot, therefore, but exceedingly approve of the Conduct of those, who not being able to determine themselves by their own proper Light, have recourse to their Pastors, and other Persons of Ability and Knowledge : But that which seems to be of the greatest Concernment in this respect is, that they ought not so absolutely to rely on the Opinion of others, of what Character soever, as to imagine, that they shall always act with a safe Conscience, in conforming to the Directions of those with whom they advise.

If this were sufficient, it must be so for one, or other of the following Reasons, either because it was impossible, that the Persons whom we consult should deceive us ; or because, though they did deceive us, yet their Authority would be our Excuse, and would cover all that was amiss in the Action : But neither of these can possibly be affirm'd.

For as to the first, who is not sensible, that as each particular Pastor, each particular Divine, so the most skilful and judicious of all Divines and Pastors, not only may be mistaken, but are actually mistaken every Day, in Matters of so great Nicety as those which relate to the Conscience ?

And as to the Second, with what pretence can it be imagin'd, that the Authority of Man should prevail against that of God ? If God has forbidden an Action, shall the Judgment

ment of a Man who maintains this Action to be lawful, supersede the Divine Prohibition? Has God submitted his Laws to the Conceit and Humour of his Creatures?

I know what is usually objected upon this occasion: It is said, That our Lord commanded the *Jews* of his Time, punctually to obey the Directions of the Scribes and Pharisees, who sat *in Moses seat*; and that St. Paul thus admonishes the *Hebrews*, *Obey them that have the Rule over you, and submit your selves; for they watch for your Souls, as they that must give account.* Heb. xiii. 17.

But there are two Considerations which evidently shew, that these Texts are improperly alledged, and that the Opinion which they are cited to defend, is really false. The first is, That the same Holy Scriptures command Children to obey their Parents, and Servants their Masters; whereas every one knows, that the Obedience which these Inferiors owe to their respective Superiors, is limited, and does by no means hold in opposition to the Will of God.

The other Consideration which demonstrates the Falsity of this Opinion is, That as the Scripture enjoyns us to follow our Pastors and Guides, so it enjoyns us no less expressly to try and examine their Doctrines and Decisions, and gives us clearly to understand, that we ought to reject these when contrary to the Divine Will. Thus our Saviour commands his Hearers, to *beware of the Leaven of the Scribes and Pharisees.* Mat. xvi. 6. Thus St. Paul would have us *prove all things, and hold fast nothing but what is good.* 1 Thes. v. 21. And thus

St.

1 John iv. 1. St. *Johñ* cautions us against believing *every Spirit*; and bids us *try the Spirits, whether they are of God.*

Nor is this all yet; for our Lord has expressly told us, that we may lose our selves by following the guidance of those who go astray: *If the blind, (says he) lead the blind, both shall fall into the Ditch.* And speaking of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, he observes, that as  
 Mat. xv. 14. *they enter'd not themselves into the Kingdom of God,*  
 Mat. xxiii. 13. *so they hindered others from entering in.*

Indeed, were the People obliged to yield a blind compliance to the Direction of their Pastors, the *Jews* would, on this Principle, be justified in rejecting the Gospel, in crucifying our Lord, and in putting his Apostles to death; for all this was what their Pastors required and commanded. But as they sinned, and lost themselves, by their obsequiousness to these evil Guides, so 'tis manifest that we must have a better Warrant than what Men can give us, if we would be secure from the same Danger.

I agree, therefore, That doubting Persons should apply themselves to their Pastors and Teachers, to be resolved of their Doubts; but I cannot agree, that the former should blindly be concluded by the Decisions of the latter. It is a Pastor's Duty, not to captivate to his own Authority the Mind and Conscience of his Flock, not magisterially to determine, but with Humility and Modesty to declare, what he judges most agreeable to the Will of God; above all, he ought to see that his Judgment be as well-grounded as possible,



possible, endeavouring with all his strength and skill to clear up the Understanding of the Party, and to convince him of the Truth of what he proposes.

On the other side, It is the Duty of private Persons to examine by the Word of God, and by the Light of Conscience, the Answers which they receive from their Pastor, and attentively to weigh and consider the Reasons on which they are founded, so as not to yield to them, unless upon a full perswasion that they are solid and just. In a Word, I assert that the Decision of a Pastor, or a Divine, is a very proper and useful means whereby to arrive at the Knowledge of our Duty: but I can, upon no account allow, that it should be establish'd for such a Rule to which we are necessarily bound to conform our selves and our Practice.

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## C H A P. XVI.

*Whether the Judgment of one, or more, of the Fathers, is sufficient to resolve a practical Doubt?*

IT is easie to apprehend, from what I have but now delivered, how very different I am in Opinion from those who pretend, that the Authority of any one *Grave Doctor*, (to use their own Phrase,) is sufficient to remove a Doubt of this kind, and to ensure the Conscience of the Party who submits to it.

it. This Notion is so much decried at present, even by the Church of *Rome* it self, and is so effectually overthrown by what I have observed in the preceding Chapter, that 'twould be needless to give it a farther Consideration.

But they who have shewn themselves the most violent Opposers of this monstrous Doctrine, advance another which ought to be examined. They tell us, that instead of the Modern Casuists we should follow the *Fathers*, and that the only Decisions which we ought to regard are such as bear those Venerable Names.

It were to be wish'd, that they had explain'd themselves more distinctly on this Point: What *Fathers* ought to be our Guides in matters of Conscience? Is it every particular Father? Is it the major part of them? Are they all the *Fathers* absolutely and without exception? Or, Is it enough if some of the Number deliver themselves upon a Question, and the rest Authorize that Doctrine by their Silence?

If they pretend, that the whole Body of the *Fathers* have expressly and formally decided our Doubts, they would give us a Remedy which could very seldom be applied to use. For who is not sensible, that the greatest part of the *Fathers* have never treated on this Subject; and that even those of the Number who have touch'd upon it, have scarce descended to any of those Questions which are most necessary to be resolved? So that if it were requisite to have the Positive Consent of the *Fathers*, for the settling

ting every Point in Morality, I know not whether any one such Point could ever be determined.

If they are satisfied with a Negative Consent, I mean, with the Judgment of some few, not contradicted by the rest, I would desire to know in the first place, What certainty they have that four, or five, of the Fathers, who alone have handled some particular Point, were not really mistaken in their Decision of it? Is it, because they were never mistaken, tho' in a greater Number? Or, Is it because God had obliged himself to render these four or five Infallible, whenever they should treat of such Questions as the rest had omitted? At what time did he make this Engagement? Or, What Proof is there that he made it at all?

But supposing this way of knowing the Truth to be most sure and certain; yet 'tis so very difficult to be follow'd, that we may still pronounce it absolutely useless: For to render it serviceable, 'tis necessary to have read the whole Course of the Fathers with the greatest exactness, and to have observ'd all that they have offer'd upon every Case. Without taking this Precaution, how can we possibly be assured that that as many of them, as have spoken to the Point in hand, are perfectly agreed?

What then, shall we count Voices, and follow the Majority? The Persons with whom I am now concern'd, are by no means of this Opinion. For besides that the same difficulty would return, of our being obliged to read the whole Course to know on which

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side



sides the Majority lay; so that they confess it to be very possible that the Major part of the Fathers might have been in an Error; which I have evinced at large in another Discourse.

But is the Authority of one, or two, therefore sufficient? As indeed, they who build chiefly on this Foundation, commonly alledge no more. If the greater Number of the Fathers might very possibly mistake, who shall persuade me that one or two were infallibly exempted from the like Danger?

Whoever will take the pains to read the Tract of *Lupus*, Professor at *Louvain*, *De opinione probabili*, which is to be found in the first Volume of his *Opuscula*, will see a great many false Decisions, which have been given by the most celebrated Fathers.

He will see, that St. *Austin* durst not condemn the Marriage of a Christian with an Infidel.

That *Alexander* of *Antioch*, *Acacius* of *Berea*, *Praylus* of *Jerusalem*, *Theodore* of *Syria*, and *Proclus* of *Constantinople*, were of Opinion, That a Man who had been twice married was no way irregular, but might be promoted to the Office of a Bishop, tho' many other Fathers, and the whole Church of *Rome*, for several Ages, believ'd the contrary.

That not only the Bishops of *Africk* and *Asia*, who lived before the Council of *Nice*, were for the rebaptizing of Persons baptiz'd by Hereticks; but that, after the said Council, which is affirm'd to have given a contrary Determination, St. *Athanasius*, St. *Basil*,  
St.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Optatus of Milevum, and many others, persisted in the same Judgment.

That the Fathers of the Greek Church, and a great Number of the Latin, believed Marriage to be so dissolv'd by Adultery as that the innocent Party might marry again; while some of the Latin Fathers, as well as the present Roman Church, maintained the opposite Doctrin.

That the Oath of him who has sworn never to be a Bishop, was by many allowed as good and valid, and by many others condemn'd as null and void.

That St. Cyprian, Lactantius and St. Austin, held it unlawful to defend our Life, by slaying an unjust Aggressor, whose Violence we cannot otherwise escape; tho' none, at present, are of so severe an Opinion.

He who shall consult the *Bibliotheca sacra* of Sixtus Senensis, (Lib. V. Annot. 107.) will find that Origen, St. Chrysostom, Cassian, and St. Jerome, thought there were some Occasions which would justify a Lie.

The Passage of Origen, St. Athanasius, St. Chrysostom, St. Epiphanius, St. Hilary, St. Ambrose, Chromatius, St. Jerome, the Author of the imperfect Comment on St. Matthew, Theophylact, Oecumenius and Euthymius, produced by the same Writer, (Lib. V. Annot. 26.) manifestly shew, however they may be answered, or evaded, that all these Fathers adjudg'd it absolutely unlawful for a Christian to swear.

He that reads the History of the Council of Constantinople under Justinian, usually

term'd the fifth General Council, will see the whole Church divided upon this Question, Whether it be lawful to condemn such Persons as have died in Christian Peace and Communion.

Many Examples of the like Nature might be added ; but these are enough to demonstrate, that the Fathers, as well as other Writers, were frequently mistaken in deciding Cases of Conscience ; and, by consequence, that their Authority is not of power sufficient to remove our Doubts in this respect.

Nothing but the Word of God duly studied and meditated, and its Maxims rightly applied, can afford us a secure dependence. If this Light does not clear up our Doubts, I know of none other that can effectually resolve them.

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## C H A P. XVII.

*What course we ought to take, when no Certainty is to be had. Four Questions to be examined on this Subject.*

**B**UT, it will still be said, from what cause soever our Doubts arise, and by whatever Remedy they are to be cured, is it not evident, that on many occasions, when we have done all, or at least, when we think we have done all, that is possible, our Doubt remains, and we are under the same Uncertainty as at first ? Nay, is it not undeniable, that



that there are infinite Cases in which we are obliged to determine upon the Spot, and without being allow'd a Moments Deliberation? We must know therefore what we may depend upon; We must have one or more General Rules which we may safely follow, either when we have not sufficient time to resolve our Doubts, or when we have laboured in their Resolution without Success.

This we must own to be very just; and therefore it is incumbent on us to give the Rules which we desired. But it will be requisite, before-hand, to call to Mind what has been already observ'd, that there are properly but three Cases of Doubt. I. When the Reasons on both sides appear of equal force. II. When there is some little inequality, but not such as ought to determine us. III. When we presume that all the Reasons which may be urged *Pro* and *Con*, have not been yet considered by us. This third Case ought to give us no trouble; for I here suppose that we have used our utmost endeavour to find out the Reasons, and that they still remain undiscovered: And therefore the whole is reduced to the two former.

It may be useful farther to observe, That we are not barely to have regard to the strength or weakness of the Reasons appearing. We ought likewise to consider, whether one side is more safe than the other, or whether both are equally dangerous. That side is, in our Notion safe, which we can run no risque by embracing, tho' what we do should at length prove not to have been

necessary. I produced an Instance of it in one of the foregoing Chapters, taken from a Doubt in the Case of Restitution; which to make, tho' we only fear that 'tis due, is to take the safer side; because in making it we incur no Danger, whereas in omitting it we incur the Danger of Sin.

Sometimes, therefore, it so happens that the Danger is equal on both sides; as when a Man is in Doubt whether or no he shall change his Religion: For he sins either way, if he is mistaken; either by persisting in a false Religion; or by embracing one which proves not to be the true. But sometimes too it happens, that the Danger lies on one side only, and that the other is safe and innocent, whether the Party mistake or not. As in the Example concerning Restitution but now mention'd, and in a thousand more, which might be added, of the like Nature.

All this being supposed, there are four Queries which present themselves to our examination. First, What we ought to do, when the Reasons appear equal on both sides, but one side is false, and the other not? Secondly, What we ought to do, when the more unsafe side is likewise the more improbable? Thirdly, What we ought to do when that side which has least safety has most probability? Fourthly, What we ought to do, when the Danger is the same either way, whether the Probability be equal or unequal? Let us consider these several Questions, as they lie in order before us.

## C H A P. XVII.

*Whether of two contradictory Opinions,  
equally probable, we may choose that  
which is least safe?*

THE Modern Casuists assert, That when two contradictory Opinions are founded upon Reasons, or Authorities of equal force, we may take which we please, without enquiring into their comparative Safety.

They declare, that both become safe by this means, and that if the less safe in appearance should also at the bottom prove false, yet we could not Sin in following it; or, at least, that this could only be a Sin, as to the *Matter*, and therefore such as would never be laid to our Charge.

But I have three very powerful Arguments to oppose to this Imagination. The first, Is that celebrated Maxim of the Canon Law, or rather of the Law of Nature, *In dubiis tutior pars eligenda*; *in doubtful Cases we ought to take the safer side*, If this Maxim be allowed, the Hypothesis of the Casuists falls to the Ground.

For I would gladly be inform'd, whether the Person who is supposed thus to apprehend a Parity of Reasons *Pro* and *Con*, pronounces upon the Truth of that side which he follows, and upon the Fashood of that which he declines, or whether he suspends his Judgment, as to the whole Question.



If he ventures to pronounce, he acts rashly and unadvisedly; for he gives a preference, without any reason to fix it on the one side rather than on the other.

Nor does he act less imprudently; for since the Persuasion which he embraces may prove false, he exposes himself to the Danger of being deceived.

But if he suspends his Judgment, then he is properly in a doubting Condition, and if in that Condition he takes the unsafe side, he sins; because he violates the Maxim which I but now recited, and which none will pretend to dispute.

This Proof being nothing less than Demonstration, the Casuists have used their utmost Efforts to elude it: Some of them maintain, That there's no Doubt in this Case; because, say they, there can be then only room for Doubt when we see no Reason *Pro* or *Con*; as if we should be ask'd, whether the Number of the Stars is even or odd. Others distinguish between a two-fold Doubt, Negative and Positive; the one, when there's no Reason either way, the other when the Reasons are upon a Ballance; and they tell us, that the Maxim of Law which directs us in doubtful Matters to take the safer side, is applicable only to Negative Doubts.

But the Authors of both these Replies are certainly mistaken: The Error of the former is notorious; for the Use of all Writers, Sacred and Profane, evinceth, that we may still be said to be in Doubt, tho' there are Reasons on both sides, between which we dare not determine. When St. Peter feared

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to throw himself in the Sea, he had Reason to be thus apprehensive, and he had Reason to be confident; and yet we find our Saviour asking him; *O thou of little faith*, Mat. xiv. *wherefore didst thou doubt?* When Abraham<sup>31</sup> believed that he should become the Father of many Nations, he had Reason thus to believe, and he had Reason likewise to be distrustful; Yet St. Paul chiefly commends his Faith, in that he *staggered not*, or *doubted* Rom. iv. *not*, which supposes it possible for him to have doubted. When St. James makes it a condition of Prayer, that we should ask with Faith, *nothing wavering*, or *doubting*, Jam. i. 6, and says, *he that wavereth, or doubteth, is like a wave of the Sea*; he speaks of a Doubt caus'd by such Reasons as are weak and false, and then determined by such as are good and solid. When the Canon Law declares, that he who doubts in Matters of Faith is an Infidel, (*dubius in fide infidelis est*,) it means such a Doubt as does not wholly exclude Reasons and Arguments. When all Divines, after they have proposed a Question, begin the Discussion of it with these Terms, *Ratio dubitandi est*, &c. *The reason of the doubt is so or so*; 'tis plain they take it in the same Sense. And, in short, no Man ever expressed himself otherwise.

This first Evasion, therefore, is ridiculous; nor is the second more creditable. Negative Doubt is mere Notion and Chimera: If we have no Reasons either *Pro* or *Con*, we are not in a state of Doubt, but of Ignorance. But admitting this Distinction, and allowing some Doubts to be styl'd Negative;

tive; nothing can be hence infer'd, if at the same time it must be confess'd, that when the Canon Law obliges us in doubtful Matters to take the safer side, it speaks of such Doubts as these Authors term Positive: For then, if two contradictory Opinions are supported by Reasons of equal force, it is only lawful to follow that which is the safer of the two; and so the Casuists are under a mistake.

And yet it is most certain, that the Canon Law speaks of Doubt in this latter Sense, as will appear to any who shall consult the several Places where the said Maxim is alledg'd. We find it, in the Chapter *Ad audientiam, de homicidio*, in the Chapter *Juvenis, de sponsalibus*, and in the *Clementine, Exivi, de verborum Significatione*; and in all these places it is applied to such Doubts as arise from a parity of Reasons; some of which Reasons are expressly noted in the Text, and others are clearly implied. Particularly in the *Clementine, Exivi*, the Doubt which the Pope determines by this Maxim, is that which had divided the *Cordeliers* about interpreting the Rule of their Order. Here each Party had their Reasons, and such Reasons as were strong enough, according to their different Hypothesis; and, consequently, the Pope directing them in this Case to take the safer side, did certainly judge, that the said Maxim ought to be applied to those Doubts which proceed from a parity of Reasons, and which are commonly term'd Positive.

What I have now said is fully demonstrative against the Casuists; but it is not of the same



same force with us, who pay so little veneration to the Pope's Decretals. To supply this defect, I affirm, in short, that if under a Negative Doubt it is imprudent to choose the side which has least safety, (as is confessed by all the World,) it can never be prudent to choose the same side, under a positive Doubt: The Danger is the same in the one, and in the other; 'tis alike possible in both, that this side which is less safe may also prove to be sinful. If therefore Christian Prudence suffers us not to run such a hazard in the former Case, how should it allow us thus to expose our selves in the latter?

It is certain likewise, that those Arguments by which the Casuists endeavour to prove, that we may lawfully take which side we please in Positive Doubts, extend with equal force to the Negative. They say, that every Man is in possession of his Liberty, and that in doubtful Matters the Possessor's Condition is the better, and his Plea the more favourable. They say, 'tis an Indication that a Law has not been sufficiently publish'd, when we cannot clearly and distinctly perceive what it obliges us to. If these Reasons are good, they are so no less in respect of Negative than of Positive Doubts. But being insufficient in the former, by the Confession of all the World, they cannot be valid in the latter, and, therefore, holding true of neither, the Opinion, which pretends to be built upon them, appears to be groundless, and as such, ought to be rejected.

Thus the Answers given by the Casuists have no manner of solidity; and therefore

fore my first Argument subsists in its force. A second Argument I draw from hence, that when a Persuasion is opposed by Reason of the same strength with those which support it, 'tis very possible it may be false, and then if the Question turn upon the Divine Law, Natural or Positive sufficiently revealed, 'tis very possible that the said Persuasion should be contrary to this Law, and consequently the Action performed in strength of it sinful. Let us suppose this to happen accordingly; let us suppose a Man to be determin'd by such a Persuasion as is less safe, and is likewise repugnant to the Law of God; let us suppose him to follow it in practice: By so doing it is manifest that he will sin, and that his Sin will be justly imputed to him; for why should it not be thus imputed? It would not, I confess, if the Error which occasion'd it had been the Effect of invincible, and involuntary Ignorance. But I have shewn, that 'tis impossible to be under such Ignorance, in regard either of the Law of Nature, or of the Divine Positive Law sufficiently reveal'd. Thus the Sin will in this Case be imputed, and, by consequence, to allow Men in following which Opinion they please, is to give them license to Sin.

My last Argument is, That 'tis wholly unconceivable the Love of God should permit us to do that, which Friendship, and other Affections purely Human, will not suffer in our Practice. If we truly and sincerely love any Person, we shall never do what we have reason to fear may displease him; and it be equally possible that this beloved Party should be offended with what we have otherwise a Desire

Desire to do, as that he should not, the Affection which we bear to him will never let us perform it ; or if we do undertake it, 'tis plain we set a very little value upon his Friendship, and have but a slight Notion of grieving and opposing him ; and how then is it possible for a Man who loves God above all things, and in that supreme Degree which alone can entitle us to the Character of his Sons, for such a Man to venture upon an Action, when he has as good reason to think that it will be displeasing to God, as that he will look upon it with indifference, and without offence ?

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## C H A P. XIX.

*Whether we may with a safe Conscience follow such a Persuasion as we know to be less probable, and, at the same time less safe, than the contrary ?*

THE Remarks which I have already offered are sufficient to inform us what we ought to think of that Conceit of the Casuists, in which they seem to give the full Reins to their licentious Opinions, and to have carried them to the utmost Excess: They tell us, That when a Persuasion is at the same time less safe and less probable than the contrary, we may yet with a safe Conscience be guided by it. But how is it possible we should be allowed to fix the preference on that side which has a less degree of Probability, when it has been shewn that we are not permitted to prefer that which has the same ?

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And yet, besides, there are three other Considerations which clearly demonstrate the great Absurdity of this Hypothesis; for in the first place, it is notoriously opposite to all the Rules of Prudence. A Man who should act upon it in the Affairs of this Life, would justly incur the Censure of Weakness and Inconsideration. It seems, indeed, to be the whole Business of Prudence, to compare exactly the several Degrees of Probability, which appear in the Reasons on both sides. To determine in favour of those Reasons which have more Degrees, and yet to be sway'd in Practice by those which have Fewer, is a manifest Imprudence: Nay, it is an Imprudence into which the weakest Persons are not wont to fall, otherwise than by taking that to be more probable which is really less.

Especially, Men observe this Precaution, when there appears any danger on one side, and the greater Danger, the more solicitous they are not to expose themselves to it: Wherefore, there being no Danger equal to that of Sinning, and of displeasing God, we cannot more directly violate the Rules of Prudence, than by venturing so great a Misfortune; especially by venturing it without any other Foundation to assure us that it will not happen, but those Reasons which we see and know to be less solid than the contrary.

But it will be said, the smallest Probability is still a Probability, and as such we may content our selves with it, and yet bring no Reflection upon our Prudence. I am surpris-  
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zed to see Men of Parts and Learning build their Sentiments upon a Principle so false and precarious. I confess, indeed, that we might be satisfied with Reasons which have so small a Degree of Probability, if these were the only Reasons, and if they were not opposed by others more probable. I confess, this would not call our Prudence into Question: But I maintain, that it is utterly inconsistent with Prudence, to prefer less probable Reasons to those which are so in a higher Degree. I maintain, that the common Notions of good Sense will not tolerate so indirect a Choice.

Let a pair of Scales be set even. An Ounce weight put into one of them will sink it. A weight of two Ounces put into the other will lift up the first. In the same manner, propose to a Wise Man such Reasons as have but one Degree of Probability, these will at first determine him: But propose to him other Reasons, which are contrary to these, and have two Degrees of Probability, the Latter will prevail, or at least will hinder the Force and Prevalency of the Former.

II. This is my first Reason. My Second is, That if the Opinion of the Casuists were true, there would be scarce any Irregularity which we might not commit innocently, and with a safe Conscience; Because, indeed, there would be very few which might not be authoriz'd by probable Arguments. For as to that Probability which is term'd *Extrinsiccal*, some Authors reputed very *Grave*, have built a Thousand Decisions upon it, which patronize, or at least permit the most vitious

ous Excess. This has been demonstrated with the utmost Evidence, by several Writers; especially by the famous Author of the Provincial Letters.

As for *Intrinsic* Probability, there are few Sins which might not be excus'd by such Reasons as would appear very specious, and in this Sense would pass for probable. *Mercuri* an *Italian*, who writ some time since against the modern Casuists, has evinc'd this, by a great number of Examples. I shall recite but one of them: It is that of the *First* and *Original* Transgression, which was punish'd with so much Severity, and the Effects of which remain to this Day. Let us observe, how the said Author, according to the Rules of Probability, proves even this not to have been a Sin.

It is a probable Opinion, according to *Navarre*, *Lessius*, and *Gregory* of *Valentia*, that Penal Laws do not oblige in Conscience: Upon which Principle, our First Parents had reason to believe, that they could not sin by eating of the Forbidden Fruit: For the Law which forbid them to eat of it was manifestly Penal; *In the Day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely Dye.*

It is another probable Opinion of some Doctors, that God cannot prohibit a light or indifferent Action, under the pain of Mortal Sin; yet, in all appearance, what can be lighter than the bare eating of an Apple?

Again, It is a probable Opinion, follow'd by many Authors, that a *Penal* Law, especially when (in the strictest Sense) *Positive*, such as this Law given to *Adam* no doubt was,

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can oblige those only to whom it is expressly and personally directed. Since therefore, God directed this Law to *Adam* only; and since it has been suppos'd that *Eve* was not created at the time when the Prohibition commenc'd, there were grounds for her to think, not without Probability, that she was no way affected by it: And by Consequence, if to act upon a probable Opinion can never be sinful, *Eve* did not Sin in this Case, and so the Sentence pronounc'd against her by God, will become unjust.

III. My third Reason is taken from the Doubt which *Caramuel* proposes to the whole Learned World, in the First Edition of his *Theologia Fundamentalis*. He says, That if it be lawful to follow the least Probability, it cannot be denied, but that the *Protestants* may with a safe Conscience live and die in their own Religion, because it must be confess'd, that their Religion is probable.

Indeed, he attempted to answer himself in the Fourth Edition of his Work, by applying to his Objection that known Maxim of the Casuists, that Probability is destroy'd by the opposite Certainty. He pretends, That the Religion of *Protestants* is most certainly false, as being opposite to the Faith of the Catholick Church; and he concludes, that it can have no degree of Probability.

But 'tis easy for us to shew the Weakness of this Evasion. We need only enquire of the Author; what sort of Certainty that is by which, according to him, the opposite Probability is destroy'd.

In the first place, it cannot be that Certainty which is stiled *Objective*, and which belongs to things, when 'tis impossible they should be otherwise. Whatever is agreeable to Divine Law, Natural or Positive, becomes certain in this manner: And by Consequence, if such a Certainty ruins the Probability on the other side, nothing that is opposite to the Divine Law can be probable, which the Casuists will never allow.

Let us see, Whether it be that which is commonly term'd *Subjective* Certainty. And here, to cut off all Cavil and Subterfuge, it may not be improper to distinguish in the Case. This Certainty, therefore, is of two kinds: The one may be call'd Certainty in *Law*, agreeing to all those things, of which we ought to be fully assured, Whether we are so, or not: The other may be call'd Certainty in *Fact*, agreeing to all those things of which we have a strong Persuasion, Whether or no we ought to be thus persuaded.

Which of these two *Subjective* Certainties is that in *Caramuel's* Answer? Is it the Second, or Certainty in Fact? If this be his Sense of the Word, he is notoriously mistaken. *Protestants* have no such Certainty of the Falseness of their Religion; nay, they are, in this manner, certain of its Truth.

Would he therefore be understood of Certainty in Law? Would he say, that the *Protestants* are not indeed certain of the Falsity of their Religion, but that they ought to be so, and deserve Censure for being otherwise? If this be his Judgment, he grants me what I desire: For then, no Opinion contrary to the

the Law of Nature, or to positive Law sufficiently revealed, can be probable. The Reason is evident, because we ought to be certain of every thing that is agreeable to the said Laws; and not to be thus certain, is a sinful Defect worthy of Blame and Punishment: And by Consequence, if this be sufficient to destroy all Probability on the opposite side, nothing contrary to the said Laws can be probable, or can, for that Reason, be follow'd with a safe Conscience.

Tho' I have already produced such Arguments against the Opinion of the Casuists, as are sufficient to shew the great Absurdity of it, yet it may not seem improper still to enforce them with some others. For we cannot too strongly oppose so fatal and pernicious a Doctrine, which if receiv'd, would evacuate the whole Morality of the Gospel.

I. Evidence is to the Understanding, as Good is to the Will. As, therefore, 'tis a Contradiction to all the Rules of Wisdom, to prefer a Good which we look upon as less, to another which we look upon as greater in all respects, so it is an utter Violation of the same Rules to prefer a Probability which we know to be less, to another Probability which we know to be greater.

II. What should we say of a Physician, who of two Medicines alike easy to be procur'd, should prescribe that to his Patient which was less safe, and less approved? What should we say of a Patient, who of two Physicians unequal in their Abilities and Experience, should chuse, *ceteris paribus*, to put himself into the Hands of the more ignorant,



rather than of the more skilful? What should we say of a Guest, who being offer'd his Choice of two Dishes of the same Meat, and being sure that one of the Dishes is not Poyson'd, while he is advertiz'd by Persons of Credit that the other is so, should leave the Former to sit down to the Latter? What should we say of a Merchant, who when he might put his Goods on board either of two Vessels, the one sound, the other not, should chuse to trust them in the unsound bottom? What should we say of a Traveller, who when he might take either of two Roads, should prefer that in which is inform'd there are Robbers lying in wait to murther him? Is it not most notorious, that all these several Persons would act with very great Folly and Stupidity? Yet their Folly would only consist in preferring a less Probability to a greater: And if 'tis foolish to act after this manner in our temporal Affairs, will it not be a higher degree of Folly, to proceed thus in our Spiritual? I say, the Folly and Absurdity would be much more heighten'd in the latter Case; because the more importunate any Business is to us, the more Care and Caution we ought to use in the Prosecution of it.

III. 'Tis agreed on all hands, that we sin by acting while we are under Scruples. We ought first to conquer and expel them, if we would act with Innocence: But now, if bare Scruples may render an Action Criminal, how much more such Arguments as appear good and solid, and even better and more solid than those of the contrary Opinion, which we yet chuse to follow in our Practice?

Who

Who is not sensible, that the more cogent the Reasons appear on the opposite side, the more heinous must be our Sin, if we slight and contemn them?

IV. If the Opinion of the Casuists were true, nothing could be more vain and unprofitable, than to pray to God that He would direct us to the Knowledge of the Truth : For to what use or purpose could this Knowledge serve, if we were in no more danger of sinning, and by consequence of losing our selves without it, than under its Assistance? Probability, and not Truth, would then be the sole Object of our Enquiries. And yet it was Truth, and not Probability, which Holy Men have ever desir'd to obtain. It was that which they constantly made the great Subject and Matter of their Petitions ; as those of *David*, in so many Passages of his Psalms, amply testify.

V. According to this Hypothesis, the whole Study of Morality would be render'd utterly useless. It would be in vain for Learned Professors to waste their Spirits with examining which Opinions were the truest. It would be sufficient for them to know which were probable ; and in order to this Knowledge, they would not be put to the trouble of searching into their Reasons and Foundations ; but need only inform themselves historically, whether they have been follow'd by any other Doctors, or not. Wherefore, all this being manifestly absurd to suppose, the Principle on which it is grounded, can never be consistent with Truth and Reason.

## C H A P. XX.

*The Objections of the Casuists Answer'd.*

**T**HE Absurdity of that Opinion of the Casuists, which I have but now refuted, is so gross and palpable, that we may be astonish'd to see Men who want neither Learning nor Subtilty, undertaking its Defence; especially, if we consider the Reasons by which they support it. They alledge but three or four, and these neither solid, nor even specious, but such as immediately discover and betray their own Weakness.

In the first place, they make the most of a Notion which I have already disprov'd, that to act sagely and prudently we need only be furnish'd with probable Arguments. I have shewn the quite contrary. I have shewn, that this Rule can only take place, when these probable Arguments are not oppos'd by others of a greater, or an equal Force. And besides, the Persuasion which we follow ought at least to be equally safe with that which we decline, as will be made appear in the next Chapter.

They say in the second place, That there is an infinite number of Moral Questions, which cannot be decided by such Proofs as are convincing and demonstrative: Whence they infer, that if a bare Probability be not sufficient, we must be eternally perplexed, and no Man can ever know his Duty in these Particulars.

We



We answer, there is a very easy way of determining in such Cases without Sin ; and that is, always to take the safer side.

They reply, That this Expedient is very incommodious, and that we shall be reduced to great straits, if we may be allow'd to do nothing but what is either more safe, or undoubtedly innocent.

But we can soon rejoin, That 'tis indeed the *narrow way* alone which leadeth to Life, and that this very easiness of avoiding Sin, without offering the least Violence to our Nature, which is one of the Consequences of the Doctrine of Probability, renders the said Doctrine still more suspicious, the whole Tenour of Scripture informing us, That 'tis a Matter of great Difficulty to preserve our Innocence, and to work out our Salvation.

In the third place they affirm, That the Probability of any Opinion which prompts us to violate a Law, is an Argument that the said Law has not been sufficiently reveal'd, and by Consequence, that the Violation of it cannot be sinful.

This Objection would appear with some Strength, if they suppos'd, or (as we ought rather to speak) if they prov'd, that every one who is guided by a false Opinion, judging it to be probable, has done all that he was able, and all that he was obliged to do, towards the full discovery of his Duty. But since they cannot prove this, and since I have indeed prov'd the contrary in one of the preceding Chapters. The Objection appears to be Weak and Groundless : For can it enter into any Man's Thought, that God

will resign his Authority, and remit all his Power of obliging us, only because we will not design to inform our selves of what he has commanded ?

From the Discourse of these Men it seems to follow, that the Care of providing all things necessary for our Eternal Welfare, is incumbent upon God alone ; and that we have nothing to do, but quietly to attend his Disposals, without contributing any Endeavours on our part ; and that, if at any time we are ignorant of our Duty, it is purely our Misfortune, and by no means our Fault. But now, since all this is utterly false, since it is certain, that our Interest and our Duty oblige us with equal Force, to instruct our selves in the Will of God, since it is manifestly our Fault if we do it not ; and yet since it often happens ; that we purposely avoid such Instruction : 'Tis evident, that we sin in doing what God has forbidden, Whether we rightly understood the Sense of his Law, or whether our own Negligence hinder'd us from understanding it.

So that 'tis a very false way of reasoning to say, that a Law appears to be insufficiently publish'd, because we have a probable belief, that we may do what it forbids. 'Tis possible it may have been more than sufficiently publish'd, and that we stupidly impose upon our selves by such Reasons, are as false and deceitful, though agreeable to our own Prejudices and Passions, when we make our selves believe, that this Holy Law permits what it really condemns.

Lastly,

Lastly, they urge, that every Man is in possession of his own Liberty: They add, that doubtful Matters are always wont to be determin'd in favour of the Possessor. And hence they conclude, that to deprive a Man of the liberty of doing what he lists, 'tis necessary there should be such an Evidence as is exclusive of all Doubt, which cannot be, when there are probable reasons to persuade the contrary.

But it is easie to reply, That if this Maxim can ever take place, it must be when the Doubt is involuntary, and arises from the Thing, not from the Person: For, if we therefore only doubt, because we will not be at the trouble of seeking and knowing the Truth, 'tis wholly inconceivable that such a Doubt should give us a Right to violate the Law of God, who, perhaps, has forbidden the Action which we venture upon.

To evince still more clearly the weakness of this last Argument, as well as of the former, I would only ask the Casuists, what it is that they design to prove by it. Is it, that in all Doubts, of what Nature soever they be, and from what cause soever they proceed, we may follow which Opinion we please, in case it be but probable? Or is it, that we are only allow'd to do thus, when the Doubt arises from invincible and involuntary Ignorance?

If 'tis the latter, they only prove that which no Man contests with them. We acknowledge such Actions as proceed from invincible and involuntary Ignorance, to be free from all censure. We only maintain



two things, one of which has been demonstrated in a former Chapter, and the other is evident and indisputable. The first is, that that the Ignorance of the Divine Law, whether Natural or Positive sufficiently reveal'd, can never be invincible and involuntary: The second is, That our Ignorance shews it self to be vincible, when there are, at least, probable Arguments to support that of which we are ignorant.

If 'tis the former, the Casuists will prove against their own Confession: For they all confess, not excepting the loosest of the Number, That wilful Ignorance, whether affected, or gross, or light, cannot excuse; at least that it cannot absolutely excuse. Now the Argument which I would build on this Supposition, is as follows.

When a Man is led into Doubt by vincible and voluntary Ignorance, from which Doubt he frees himself by following a probable Opinion, either he sins, or he does not. If he does not Sin, 'tis false that only invincible and involuntary Ignorance can excuse; for here that which is neither has the same Effect, and so the Casuists are universally mistaken when they teach the contrary: But if he sins, then a bare probability is not sufficient, and the Reasons by which the Casuists would prove it to be so, are false and sophistical.

I have one thing more to observe, what I judge to be of some weight. I would ask the Casuists, Whether their Arguments upon this Point, are convincing and demonstrative, or, which amounts to the same, Whether

ther their Persuasion is certain? I believe they will not venture to say that it is: For, according to their own Rules, the contrary must be probable, as being maintain'd not by one or two grave Authors, but by a great number of Learned Professors, and eminent Bishops of the Church, who have exerted themselves against this new Hypothesis; nay, it cannot be denied, but that Pope *Innocent* XI. if he has not absolutely condemn'd it, yet has render'd it very suspicious, in his Censure of the four first Propositions, among the sixty five.

I am satisfied, therefore, that the Casuists will confess their Judgment of this Matter to be only probable; yet, if they do so, they must at the same time acknowledge the very chief of all their Evasions to be vain and useless, when we shew them, as well from the Authority of *St. Paul*, as from the Evidence of the thing it self, that in order to a Mans acting innocently, 'tis requisite he should have some kind of Certainty of the Lawfulness of what he does; they unanimously reply, that there is a two-fold Certainty, one which they term Certainty of Speculation, another which they term Certainty of Practice. The former consists in our assurance that the Action is good in it self, and agreeable to the Law of God: The latter consists in our assurance that whether the Action, in it self, be Good or Evil, we shall not Sin in performing it. They confess that he who acts upon a probable Opinion has not the first of these Certainties, yet they pretend that he has the second, because tho' he doubts  
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whether or no the Opinion which he follows is true at the bottom, yet he does not in the least doubt but that 'tis probable, and, by consequence, safe.

But the contrary is evident from what has been here observed : For, granting that he who acts upon a probable Opinion knows with certainty that it is probable ; yet does he with the same Certainty know, that every probable Opinion is safe, and may be followed without Sin ? If he has reason to doubt of this, as I have shewn that he has, then he can have no Certainty, either Speculative or Practical, and, by consequence, he must act rashly and foolishly.

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## C H A P. XXI.

*Whether we may be allowed to follow the more probable Opinion, when it happens to be the less safe ?*

FROM all that has been hitherto offer'd, it appears, that we are not permitted to prefer an Opinion which at the same time is less probable and less sure to an opposite Opinion, which has the advantage of it in both respects : But what shall we do in Case these advantages are divided, so that the greater Probability is on the one side, and the greater Safety on the other ?

The Casuists, for the most part, will not vouchsafe to consider this Difficulty, which indeed



indeed is no difficulty according to their Hypothesis. For while they maintain, that one may follow an Opinion which is both less probable and less safe, they do not question the lawfulness of following that which being less safe, is yet more probable.

The Author of *The Morals of Grenoble*, who is very far from any of their Extravagances, proposes this Question, and answers it at first with some reserve, but afterwards in a more positive manner, affirming that 'tis lawful on such Occasions to follow the less safe Opinion, provided it be the more probable.

This Decision, express'd thus in general, and without any limitation, is certainly false. I confess it to be in some measure true with regard to those Questions about which 'tis impossible to obtain any Certainty, tho' we seek it with our utmost Care and Endeavour, such as are very many Questions of Fact. 'Tis easie to apprehend, that upon these Subjects the greatest probability ought to supply the place of Certainty, and when by following this probability we are mistaken, our Error will then be involuntary, as much at least as any Error can be so.

But it is not the same in Questions of Law, in those, at least, which respect the Law of Nature, or Positive Law sufficiently revealed. If we mistake about such Questions, our Error is justly blameable, because indeed the only reason of our falling into it was our neglecting to do, all that we were able, and all that we were obliged to do for our own Information.

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Let us suppose then, the more probable Opinion in this Case to be false, as it may very possibly be. If being such, we yet follow it in Practice, 'tis evident that we sin, and that our Sin is formal, and justly imputable. For all the World agree, that our Sin is of this Character, when we fall into it, thro' wilful and inexcusable Error. Wherefore, since all Error, contrary to the Law of Nature, and to Positive Law sufficiently revealed, stands thus condemn'd, the Sin into which it betrays us, must thus share in the Condemnation.

Now I ask how we can follow with a safe Conscience an Opinion which may be false, and which being so, will lead us into a formal and imputed Sin? Does not this contain a manifest contradiction? For to act with a safe Conscience, is indeed, to be out of all danger of thus sinning. And therefore he who shall assert, That we may commit a formal Sin, and yet act with a safe Conscience, must contradict himself.

I am surpriz'd to see that a Person of M. Genet's Abilities should not be aware of so evident a Truth: That Ignorance of the Law of Nature does not excuse, is what he constantly maintains; now admitting this, how can he allow the following of an Opinion which is less safe, tho' more probable? For must he not at the same time allow the doing of that which may be contrary to the Will of God.

And therefore *Vendrokus*, who for the most part proceeds upon the same Principles with M. Genet, holds it unlawful to follow the

the more probable Opinion, unless it be, at the same time, the more safe. He affirms, that when we have done all we can to be fully assured of the Truth, and notwithstanding these Endeavours, have not yet a clear perception of it, we ought to take that side which has the joint advantage of Probability and of Safety; *Si veritas nondum ipsi niteat* (he speaks of an honest Man) *quod probabilius & tutius videbitur, id aget.* Vendrok. p. 122.

But, it will be said, we are not sure that the more probable Opinion in such a Case is really false: 'Tis very possible that it may be true. 'Tis possible, I confess, but then the contrary is by no means impossible. It may be true, and it may not; and, by consequence, we cannot follow it without the hazard of a Sin; but to run this hazard can never be innocent: For the danger of sinning is so great and terrible, that we are in no case allowed wilfully to bring it upon our selves; nay, it may justly be said, that we commit a present Sin by exposing our selves without necessity to the danger of one that is future.

What tho' it be more probable that we shall not sin, than that we shall, this is not enough; it is not enough that the former be more probable, but it must be certain. Ought we not in the great Affair of our Salvation to use all those precautions which wise Men observe in their worldly Concerns? Now they are wont accurately to compare the greatness of the Danger with the Importance of the Motives which would expose them to it; and if the Danger be an overbalance, they take care to avoid it.

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For Example, we are informed that a Dish of Meat offered to us is poisoned: We examine the several Reasons which we have to think that it is, or that it is not. Let us suppose the Reasons which would persuade us that this Information was true, to have two degrees of probability, and those which would persuade us to the contrary to have three: I assert, that upon this Supposition we ought, as we will answer it to common Sense, to abstain from the Meat; because what is wanting in the probability of the Reasons which would persuade us thus to abstain, is supplied by the danger on the other hand. By abstaining we hazard nothing, at least, as good as nothing. By eating we hazard all, because we expose our selves to the danger of losing our Life. This danger added to the two degrees of Probability in those Reasons which we have to credit the Information, visibly turns the Scale on that side. And shall not a Danger, which is greater beyond all comparison, that of sinning and displeasing God be allowed to have the same effect?

Some, perhaps, will ask, Whether a Remark which I have offered in two places of this Book, may not likewise be applied to the present Case? I have said, there are some things which God, without Injustice, might require of us, which yet he does not require, because his Goodness, and his Condescensions to us are infinite. It was upon this Principle that I formed an excuse for Errors of Fact; it was upon this, that I judged Moral Certainty to be sufficient, when no higher degrees

gree could be obtained. It should seem that we might affirm the same of such Opinions as are more probable tho' less safe than the contrary. We might think that if they should prove to be false at the bottom, yet God will not lay to our Charge the Crimes we commit in acting by their Influence, because here the greatest Probability may in some sort supply the place of Certainty.

But the Answer is ready: For, in the first place we cannot conceive that God should suffer us to act with less circumspection in the grand Affair of another Life, than in the Business of this. Now I have shewn that in temporal Concerns Men who are any way cautious or provident, will not be satisfied with a bare probability, when by acting according to it they must expose themselves to a Danger how inconsiderable soever; and therefore 'tis contrary to all sort of Reason, that we should frame to our selves a License of proceeding thus in the Service of God, and in the Care of our Salvation.

To which I add, that God has expressly declared the contrary. He has told us by the Mouth of *Solomon*, that *there is a way which seemeth right to a Man, but the end thereof are* Prov. xiv. 12. *the ways of Death.* He has informed us that Idolaters shall perish, how fully soever they may have been persuaded as to the Truth of their false Religion. He has given us to understand, that he looks on those as abominable, who shall think they do him Service by putting his true Servants to Death. From all which it is evident, that God will by no means support, or bear with the Er-

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ror of such as do what he has forbidden, with what Probability soever they may imagine that he has permitted, or even commanded it.

It will, perhaps, be said, that there is a great deal of difference between appearing probable and being really so. It will be said that the mistaken Persons, of whom I but now spoke, judged their Errors to be more probable than the opposite Truths; but then they did ill in making so wrong a Judgment. It will be added, that when Authors declare the greater Probability to be sufficient in order to Action, they do not mean that which appears greater, but that which is truly greater in it self.

But I have before-hand cut off this Evasion: For what I observed of Certainty may be applied to Probability. We may say, that nothing contrary to the Law of Nature or to Positive Law sufficiently revealed ought to appear more probable, than that which is agreeable to them. We may say, that if it does thus appear, the Fault is our own, and such a Fault as will aggravate our Guilt instead of being pleaded for our Excuse; and therefore to require that the Opinion which we follow in Practice should be more probable in it self, is to require that it should be true; which comes up to what I assert, or rather goes beyond it.

I add, that if in order to our acting with a safe Conscience 'tis necessary that the Opinion which we follow should not only appear more probable than the contrary, but should be really so, the same difficulty will  
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return. For how shall I know that I am not mistaken in my Judgment of this Probability? Such a mistake must be allowed to be very possible; and what security have I that I shall not fall into it?

Especially since very learned and judicious Persons maintain, that Probability is not an absolute Quality, agreeing to Propositions in themselves, as Truth and Falshood, but a Relative Quality, depending not so much on the intrinsic Nature of the Propositions, as upon the Degree of Light and Knowledge in the Party who judges: For, leaving the Proposition as it is, we need only increase or diminish the Sagacity and Penetration of the Persons, to make this same Proposition from improbable become probable, from probable evident; or, on the contrary, from evident become barely probable, or even improbable. But such Speculations are too nice and subtile for a Treatise of this Nature.

The main Question of the present Chapter being of the highest importance, upon the true decision of which, our Conduct in a thousand Instances depends, I hope it will not seem impertinent if I spend some farther time in examining it more fully, and setting it in its juster Light.

There are two leading Opinions on this Subject amongst the Doctors of the Church of Rome. The *Jansenists*, with some others, maintain, That in order to our acting with a safe Conscience, 'tis not sufficient for us to take the more probable Persuasion. They absolutely require that the Persuasion which

we follow should be true, and that we should have some kind of Certainty about it. But there are others who rest satisfied with the greater Probability; in which Number we may reckon many of those who have most openly declared against the looseness of the Casuists, particularly *J. B. Gonet*, and the General of the *Jesuits*.

The latter of these two Authors, declares himself to be absolutely in the Sentiments of the former; yet, I think, we may observe a considerable difference between them: *Gonet* only demands that the Persuasion which is less safe should be more probable; but the General of the *Jesuits* insists upon several other Conditions.

In the first place he tells us, we ought to be very well assured that the Opinion which we follow is the more probable of the two.

II. He requires, that the advantage which this Opinion has of the other in Probability should be great and considerable: For if the difference be but slight, he says, we ought not to regard it.

III. He requires that we should make this Judgment not as we are sway'd by Interest, Prejudice or Passion, but with Sincerity of Intention, and after we have examined the matter with our utmost Care; in a Word, that we should make it with the same Freedom and Indifference, as if we were wholly unconcerned as to the Truth of either side.

Now the result of all these Demands is still very different from what I have laid down in  
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my Eleventh Chapter. I there observed, that if we would act with a safe Conscience, we ought to have some Certainty of the lawfulness of what we do, tho' not a Physicall, or Metaphysicall, of which the Subject is incapable, yet a Moral Certainty: And to render such a Moral Certainty sufficient for these Occasions, I said two things were necessary. First, That we see no Reason to persuade us of the contrary, or however none but such the falsity, or at least the weakness of which we clearly discern. Secondly, That the Persuasion which we embrace be founded upon solid Reasons, and such as we think cannot be eluded by any coloured Objection.

The General of the *Jesuits* is satisfied with much less. He affirms, That we may act safely and innocently, tho' the Reasons on the other side continue to appear good and solid, provided they still appear inferior to those by which we are guided and determined.

So that the difference between his Judgment and mine, comes to this, I require a Certainty in the present Case; the Nature of which supposes us to look on the contrary as morally impossible, whereas he requires no such Certainty. The Point to be considered is, which of these two Judgments can lay the best Claim to the Truth.

The Reasons which determine me to persist in mine, besides those intimated in the last Chapter, are as follow.

I. The Opinion of those who assert that the greater Probability is sufficient, cannot



stand, if the Ignorance of Natural Law does not excuse. This Consequence is necessary, and therefore *Gonet*, and the General of the *Jesuits*, admit and acknowledge it as incontestable; so that we have no occasion to prove it; not to say that it has been already proved in the Chapter immediately foregoing.

Yet most certain it is, That the Ignorance of Natural Law can excuse no Man, as, I think, has been evinced with due weight and strength in the Seventh Chapter of this Book; it must therefore of necessity be confessed, that a bare Probability, how great soever, is insufficient.

II. I have a second Reason to urge, which I look upon as convincing and demonstrative. According to the Authors with whom I am now engaged, we ought to be well assured that the Opinion which in practice we follow, is more probable than the contrary. This is what the General of the *Jesuits* expressly asserts in several places, and particularly *Dissert. X. N. 12.* where he requires that the advantage of Probability, in the Opinion which we follow, should be remarkable and evident. Indeed I think none can dispute this Condition: For if the Error into which we fall by taking that to be more probable which is not so in reality, be the Effect either of our Negligence in searching after the Truth, or of any sinister engagement to our Interest, our Passions, or our Prejudices, such Error cannot be innocent, or involuntary, and therefore can never excuse.

If then we doubt, as to this advantage of Probability, we cannot act with a safe Conscience : But we must always doubt of it, if we have not some Certainty of the thing it self, as might easily be evinced. Indeed, according to these Authors themselves, the reflex Judgment by which we pronounce one Opinion to be more probable than another, depends upon the Certainty which we have, or on the one side that we have omitted nothing in order to the discovery of the Truth, and on the other side, that we have been no way byass'd either by Interest, Prejudice or Passion. But is this easy to be obtained? Is it, indeed, more easy than to gain a full assurance of the Truth or Falshood of the Opinion by which we are guided in our Conduct?

I shall recite the Words of *Gonsales* himself, from two places of his Book. *Quamvis qui honeste, operatur manifeste experiat se vehementer moveri ad asserendum contractum aliquem esse honestum per fundamenta sententiae hoc affirmantis, nihilominus cum ad probabilitatem opinionis non sufficiat quod ejus motiva appareant magna operanti; (cum etiam Hereticis & temere judicantibus proponantur ut magna, imo ut certa fundamenta suorum errorum) sed insuper requiratur, quod apparentia illa magna non proveniat ex passione judicantis, vel ex ejus imperitia & negligentia in inquirenda veritate, nequit quis esse omnino certus quod judicium suum quo judicat aliquem contractum esse lecitum, sit prudens, nisi certus sit fundamenta illius judicii sibi visa fuisse verisimiliora citra omnem passionem, & post sufficientem diligentiam ad in qui*

*rendam veritatem, & nisi certus sit se sufficienter calluisse oppositæ Sententiæ fundamenta. Aliquando enim apparent verisimiliora fundamenta unis partis, quia alterius partis fundamenta perfunctorie examinantur, & minime penetrantur, quæ si penetrarentur evaderent superiora in vi movendi. Gonsales, De recto usu opin. prob. Diss. IV. N. 82.*

And again. *Quod mihi unice difficultatem paret ne putem dictamen illud esse evidens, hoc unum est, nempe quod operans non facile potest certus esse quod fecerit sufficientem diligentiam ad inquirendam veritatem; quæ tamen certitudo videtur necessaria ut sit evidens judicium de honestate objecti: Nam si illud judicium directum est falsum ob ignorantiam culpabilem, non est prudens; quia nemo prudenter judicat esse honestum objectum reipsa inhonestum, si error iste sit culpabilis. Idem, Dissert. X. N. 29.*

III. It cannot be denied but that the whole Jewish Church believed Divorces to be lawful: And therefore it cannot be doubted but that this Opinion was more probable than the contrary. For it was not a single Doctor that permitted the Husband to put away his Wife for other reason besides Adultery; tho' this single Authority, would, according to *Gonsales*, have been sufficient; it was the full Body of their Doctors, not excepting any one of the Number.

And yet 'tis certain, that they sinned by following this Opinion: For so our Lord has taught us in his Gospel; *The Pharisees* (says the Evangelist) *came unto him, tempting him*



him, and saying unto him, is it lawful for a Man to put away his Wife for every Cause? And <sup>Mat. xix,</sup> he answered, and said unto them, have ye not read, that he which made them at the Beginning, made them Male and Female ; and said, for this Cause shall a Man leave Father and Mother, and cleave unto his Wife, and they twain shall be one Flesh : Wherefore, they are no more twain, but one Flesh. What therefore God has join'd together, let not Man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a Writing of Divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them; Moses, because of the hardness of your Hearts, suffered you to put away your Wives ; but from the Beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his Wife, except it be for Fornication, and shall marry another, committeth Adultery ; and whoso marrieth her which is put away, doth commit Adultery.

In which Words, I desire the Reader to take notice of five Particulars. First, That the Pharisees asked our Lord, not whether Divorces should hereafter be lawful under the Gospel-state, but whether they were now lawful, at the time of their speaking ; *Is it lawful for a Man to put away his Wife ?* II. That our Lord answers to this Question in a direct and positive manner, that it is not. III. That he proves the Truth of his Decision, not by Reasons taken from the Nature and Design of the Gospel, but by the Original Institution of Marriage. IV. That he says, *Moses granted a Toleration of Divorces amongst the Jews, because of the hardness of their Hearts.* V. That he positively declares

declares the marrying a second Wife, after the first has been put away, to be the Sin of Adultery. From all which it is manifest, That Divorces were ever unlawful, notwithstanding any Probability in the contrary Opinion.

IV. The *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, that is, all the Casuists of the *Jewish* Church, maintain'd, That a Son was releas'd from the Duty of maintaining his Parents in their Necessity, in case he had devoted to God, what he might have imploy'd in their Support ; as we find our Lord reproaching them, *Mat. xv. 5.* We have here then, an Opinion more probable than the contrary : But was it such an Opinion as Men with a safe Conscience might follow ? Let us hear our Lord pronouncing upon it ; *If the Blind lead the Blind both shall fall into the Ditch.* The *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, who gave so wicked a Determination, were the Blind Guides. Those who embraced their Decisions, and made them the Rules of their Practice, were the Blind Followers of these Guides. Our Lord declares, that *both shall fall into the Ditch* ; neither therefore were excusable.

V. Let us suppose an Action to be really evil, and condemn'd by the Law of Nature : but condemn'd so very obscurely, that there's a greater Probability of its being permitted. This Supposition is very possible, and will I am sure, be granted me by all. Let us conceive a Man doing such an Action : Will it in this Case, be Good or Evil, or Indifferent ?

If it be Evil my Point is gain'd ; for then the Party sins by following so great a Probability.

None will say that 'tis Indifferent ; all agreeing, That though there are Actions Indifferent in their general Nature, yet there are none so consider'd singly, and with all the train of Circumstances which attend them. In this respect, they are all either Good or Evil.

Is it therefore Good ? These Authors must affirm it to be so, or they must desert the Maxim which I now oppose : Yet this they cannot affirm without great Absurdity ; it being a constant Truth, that every good Action is the Effect of actual Grace, according to those Words of our Saviour, *Without me ye can do nothing* : But is it conceivable, that actual Grace should incline us to the doing of that which is repugnant to the Will of God ?

This is *Vendrokius's* Argument, and I look upon it as firm and substantial. *Gonet* has replied to it two Ways. First, he says, That Grace is indeed necessary for the Production of such good Works as have a Theological and Supernatural Goodness, and may entitle us to Heaven : But not for the Production of those which have barely a Moral Goodness, and are done in pursuance of no Rule but that of common Honesty, which yet is sufficient to hinder them from being Sins.

I will not enter into all the Debates which may seem requisite for the full Discussion of this Answer ; Such a Digression would lead me



a great way from my Business. I shall content my self with a single Reward. I would ask this Author, Whether the particular Action of which he speaks, has the Love of God for its Principle ; or, Whether it proceeds from any other Motive. If the Latter, 'tis a Sin ; for every Action which is not directed towards God, either as its Motive, or its End, is sinful. If the Former, 'tis an Effect of Grace, and the Goodness it has is Theological and Supernatural. And thus the first Reply made by this Author appears to be invalid.

He says, Secondly, That the Holy Spirit sometimes acts in those Hearts which he does not inhabit, barely moving and exciting them, as in the case of Attrition ; and that the Action now under Dispute may be of this Order.

But this second Reply is no better than the first : For if the Action he speaks of be an Effect of the Love of God, it cannot be produced but by one of those actual Graces which denote the Residence and Inhabitation of the Blessed Spirit.

Or let us suppose this Grace to be barely moving and exciting. Whatever it be, we cannot imagine, that the Holy Spirit should make use of it to promote an Action which, at the bottom, is contrary to the Divine Will. Is this the Employment of the Graces which he vouchsafes to lend us ? And must it not be acknowledg'd, that the Ardors which he inspires are always accompanied with Light, and that he is as well the Spirit of Truth as the Spirit of Love ?

VI. This

VI. This Argument will, I believe, appear more convincing, if applied not to the Performance or Omission about which we deliberate, (as suppose to the Restitution which we ought to make, but to that inward Act of the Mind, by which we prefer the more probable Opinion to the more safe. Now this Act is Good, Evil or Indifferent. These Authors will not style it either Evil or Indifferent, for the Reasons which I have before alledg'd. The only Question is, Whether it be Good ?

If it be so, it must either be Good in its Kind and Substance, as being absolutely commanded by God ; or being in it self Indifferent, it must be render'd Good by the Intention of the Agent.

The Former will not be said : For if God had commanded us to prefer Probability to Safety, we must sin by preferring Safety to Probability ; which no Man ever pretended, and which indeed is ridiculous.

He that shall affirm the Latter, will render this Doctrin of very little use, and by no means answerable to the Design of its Patrons ; For the Principle on which they maintain it, is the Desire they have not to perplex and disquiet the Consciences of Men, but to allow them in the doing of that which is most agreeable to their Interest, or to any other Engagements of the World, and the Flesh : But here no such Desire can take Effect ; because the Constraint which Men hope thus to avoid, would indeed return, by the Necessity which this Answer lays upon them to govern themselves in the choice of their  
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Practical Judgments, only by the Motions of their own Soul, and of God's Grace.

For Instance, I doubt whether I ought to make Restitution in a certain Case, where the Necessity of it does not evidently appear. I examine the Question, and I find on the one side, that the Affirmative is the more safe, and on the other side, that the Negative is the more probable. Here, if I were allow'd to follow my Interest, the Opinion which recommends the more probable side, though less safe, would, I confess, be very commodious : But if in fixing the Preference I am oblig'd to be guided, not by my own Interest, but by the Love of God, I do not see what great use I could make of that Freedom in Opinion : Nay, I do not see how that could any way alter the Nature of the Case.

For let us suppose, that while the Question is only consider'd *in Thesi*, 'tis allowable, not to make the Restitution under Debate. What Service can this do me, if before I resolve thus to dispense with my self, I am bound to examine, Whether the Love of God, and of my Neighbour, do not rather require me to make it, than to forbear it ? How few Occasions shall we find, in which the Love of God, and of our Neighbour, oblige us to follow the more probable Judgment, in prejudice of the more safe ? And, consequently, where are those Advantages and Conveniences with which this Opinion promises to supply us ?

VII. All



VII. All Divines agree, That Scrupulous Consciences ought to rid themselves of their Scruples, before they proceed to Action ; and that to act under them is to sin ; which, if it be so, 'tis still a greater Sin to guide our Practice by the greater Probability : For this Probability does not hinder us from looking upon the opposite Reasons as plausible : Nay, it does not hinder us from judging the said Reasons to be of some Strength and Weight. They are, therefore, more considerable than Scruples, which must ever be own'd to be vain, frivolous and contemptible : But if the Latter, thus vain and frivolous as they are, do yet cause us to sin, if we act without positively discarding them ; what must the Former do, which are so much better in themselves, and have so much juster a title to our Consideration ?

The *General* of the *Jesuits* makes a long Reply to this Objection ; but the Sum of what he offers is, That the Sin of acting under Scruples consists in the Injustice of paying so much regard to things which deserve so little : But he is certainly mistaken. The Sin committed in this Case is not our setting too great a value upon the Scruples, but our proceeding to Action while we remain under their power : Which will appear from these two Remarks.

First, That we do not accuse Scrupulous Consciences of Sin before any occasion of Action presents it self, but only if they act before they are deliver'd from their Scruples. 'Tis not, therefore, the Scruple that makes the Sin ; 'tis the Union of the Scruple and the

the Action. Indeed, were Scruples sinful in themselves, Scrupulous Consciences, as long as they remain'd such, would remain in a state of Sin, which yet none will pretend.

Secondly, That if the Sin of Scruples consisted in paying too much regard to a petty Reason, we must be guilty of this Sin, whenever we over-rated any such Reason, upon any Occasion, and in respect of any Subject. Thus a Philosopher who should lay more stress on a Conjecture than it deserv'd; a Merchant who should, without good Grounds, fear to be a Loser in a certain Purchase, would both of them sin; that is, they would do an Action displeasing to God, and exposing them to his Wrath: But since all will disclaim such a Consequence, it must be acknowledged, that the Sin of which we are speaking consists in something else.

And it certainly consists in this, That by acting while we are under any fear that our Action may offend God, we demonstrate our selves to be wanting in our Love and Veneration towards Him: For true Respect and Love will engage us to abstain not only from that which we certainly know to be disagreeable to the Person whom we esteem and affect, but from that of which we have but the least Suspicion, that it will give Him any Displeasure. Since, therefore, the Probability of the opposite Opinion, which in Practice we decline, must create a fear of this great Unhappiness, much more just and reasonable, than that which a bare Scruple can produce; the Former must, at least, be acknowledged to have the same Efficacy as the Latter.

VIII. What

VIII. What we are thus told by Divines, as to the Sin of acting under a Scrupulous Condition, is the exprefs Doctrin of St. *Paul*, *Rom. xiv. 23.* where speaking of the use of certain Meats, he says, *He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of Faith; for whatsoever is not of Faith is Sin.* To which also belongs the Command he gives in the fifth Verse, *Let every Man be fully persuaded in his own Mind.* A Man therefore sins, according to St. *Paul*, when he acts without a full Resolution of Soul, and without so strong a Persuasion of the Lawfulness of what he does, as may deserve the Name of Faith; which cannot be said of him who has but a bare Probability, or such an Opinion as is inseparably attended with a just fear of being mistaken:

IX. I may oppose to *Gonet* the same Argument which he urges against the Casuists. He says, That a Man who follows an Opinion which he judges to be less probable than the contrary, cannot excuse himself upon the Plea of Ignorance, from the Sin into which it leads him, if it proves false at the bottom; because this Ignorance is not invincible; and because it appears not to be so from the fear which the Party has, that the Opinion he is guided by may be false. *Quia* (says he, *n. 48.*) *ratione formidinis annexæ opinioni minus probabili errorem aliquo modo prævidet.* Now, if this Reason be good against the Casuists, it will likewise be good against him: For since this fear of being mistaken is essential to Opinion, he that follows the more probable Opinion must as well be subject to it, as he that follows

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the less probable ; and consequently, if he mistake, his Error will not be his Excuse.

Nay, it seems to me, That *Gonet* has not press'd this Argument against the Casuists so far as it will go, and as I may press it against him. He only insists upon the Fear of being mistaken, which always accompanies Opinion, even when attack'd by no Reason on the other side. He maintains, That this Fear sufficiently cautions us not to judge with Precipitation ; and by Consequence, renders the Error into which we fall, after such a Caution given, Voluntary. He says very true : But he ought to have added a second ground of Fear, which appears in the Reasons of the opposite Judgment. These two Fears in Conjunction do certainly effect that the Error we fall into by despising them, and by thus positively judging without better Information and Light, can by no means pass either for unwillful or inevitable, and consequently can never excuse our Fault.

*Reflections on the Philosophical Commentary, so far as it relates to this Subject.*

THE Opinion advanced by the Author of the *Philosophical Commentary*, being the same in Substance with that which I have but now refuted, I might decline the trouble of making any particular Remarks upon it, and might only desire my Reader to apply to it those Arguments which have been already produced : Yet since we cannot be

too

too strongly persuaded of the Truths which here engage me in their Defence, it will not be amiss, if I briefly demonstrate; that what this Author proposes on the present Subject, does by no means invalidate my former Assertions.

This Author has two things in view : First, to represent with what Life and Vigour he is capable of, that all Persecution on a Religious account is cruel and barbarous. Secondly, to introduce a general and unlimited Toleration for all Sects, that of *Atheism* perhaps excepted. That he may succeed in this double Design, he makes use of several Means, some more specious and plausible than others:

What he insists upon, as a principal Reason is, That those alone can be punish'd who are culpable, but that Men are not culpable in preferring that Truth which he terms supposed or imaginary, to that which is real and absolute. In order to the establishing of this second Proposition, (the first being unquestionable,) he exceedingly enhances the Rights of invincible and involuntary Ignorance, and the Endeavours to shew, that the Ignorance of Hereticks and Infidels comes under this favourable Character.

Had he been contented to say, that all the difference between those Errors which are punishable, and those which are otherwise, consists in things which are truly and distinctly seen and known by God, but are imperceptible to Men ; he had said nothing but Truth, and yet had said all that was necessary for the Proof of his Position.

The Point is not, whether God may punish Infidels and Hereticks as such; but whether they may be punish'd by Men; and whether, since we have so little Light by which to read the Hearts of others, and so little Knowledge of that exact proportion of Means which each particular Person has to inform himself of the Truth, and of that Obligation which he is under to yield it, we are yet commission'd by God to judge one another in these respects, and not only judge, but even condemn to the severest Punishments.

Had the Question been thus proposed, there would have been no need of disputing, whether there be any such thing as invincible Ignorance, with regard either to the Law of Nature, or to the Divine Positive Law sufficiently reveal'd: And therefore, this Author might have easily spared all the Paradoxes which he has given us in his Book: Nay, he might have deserv'd well of the Cause which he defends, without over-turning, as he has done all the most settled Rules and Maxims of Divinity.

Nor is this all: For by keeping within the Bounds I have mention'd, he had not thus laid himself open, and put it into the power of his Adversaries utterly to defeat and ruin him, as he has now done, by advancing so many extravagant Propositions. I shall give two Instances, taken from the Subject of which we are here treating.

It appears from the Seventh Chapter of his Second Part, That he does not except *Jews* or *Pagans* from the number of those who, on the one side, may err involuntarily; and on the



the other side, ought to enjoy the Benefit of a Toleration. Indeed, the Reasons which he makes use of to support his two Theses, are no less valid in respect of *Jews* or Pagans, than of Hereticks: For who is not sensible, That there are many and great Difficulties to be assail'd, before we can absolutely destroy the Objections of *Judaism*, or *Paganism*, against the Mysteries of our Religion.

But if this were so, How then could both the Former and the Latter be inexcusable before God? As to the *Pagans*, What would become of St. *Paul's* Assertion, concerning these miserable People, that they *hold the Truth in Unrighteousness, because that which may be known of God is manifest in them*? Who is there that does not evidently perceive these two things? First, That God has declared his severest Wrath and Vengeance against the Heathen World. Secondly, That the Crime which provok'd him to this Wrath and Vengeance, was the ill use which those mistaken People made of their Natural Light, not acknowledging and confessing, that God who had discover'd himself to them by his Works of Creation. And is not this sufficient to demonstrate, that the Ignorance of the Law of Nature can never excuse?

As to the *Jews*, if they must be pronounced Innocent in rejecting our Saviour, Why, after so many Ages, do they still feel the Punishment of God for the Fact? How came it to pass, that St. *Paul* should represent them as absolutely cut off from the Myltical Body of the Good-Olive-tree? Or, that our Lord himself should declare in so express a

manner, those who *believe not are condemn'd already?*

To give another Instance. This Author observes, in several places of his Work, particularly *pag. 537, &c.* That there is no Error more difficult to avoid, and by consequence more innocent, than that which Men are wont to fall into, with regard to the Analysis of Faith. He says, That each Party has such Arguments to propose on this Question, as the opposite Party cannot answer: That the Protestants utterly ruin the *Way of Authority*, which supposes the Church to be infallible; and that the Papists have the same advantage, in their turn, against the *Way of Examination and Discussion*, which Protestants so much commend and require: That both are admirable at pulling down, but neither at building; both excellently skill'd in the offensive, and both equally to seek in the defensive part.

I shall not here stay to examine into the Truth of this Observation; perhaps I may do it in another Work. At present I shall only say, That the Hypothesis but now mention'd furnishes the Adversaries of this Author with two Objections, to which it is impossible for him to reply.

First, That, according to this Account, the *Jews* must be acquitted in rejecting and crucifying our Lord. The Reason is manifest. The Dispute which at first divided *Jews* and *Christians*, was the same which now divides Papists and Protestants. As the only Question at present is, Whether, after the Judgment of the Church, which has condemn'd

demn'd us at *Rome* and at *Trent*, we are still allow'd to defend our Opinions, and to examine by the Rule of Scripture, the several Points of Difference between us ; so the matter then turn'd upon the same Issue : For the Question was, Whether the *Christians* were not bound to acquiesce in the Judgment of the Synagogue, which had pronounced our Lord a Deceiver, and his Miracles Illusions of the Devil ; or whether it was lawful for them to examine this Judgment by Scripture and Reason. Whatever the Church of *Rome* now alledges against us, to prove that we are not permitted to examine and dispute, but that 'tis our Duty to be guided and concluded by the Popes and Councils, the Synagogue of old produc'd, or at least might have produc'd, against the Primitive Christians. This must, of necessity, be granted.

If therefore, such a Search and Examination at present surpasses the Capacity of Private Men ; and if, by Consequence, the Error which they fall into by chusing their side is Innocent, the same must be affirm'd of the Error of the *Jews*, who thus rejected and crucified the Son of God : But we know that this Consequence is false. We know, that the *Jews* sinn'd in rejecting *Jesus Christ*. We know, that their Sin was of the highest and most enormous Kind, witness the Divine Vengeance which has pursued them ever since : And therefore, the Principles whence this Consequence naturally flows, must be also false.



Again, this same Hypothesis supplies another Objection, which the *Philosophical Commentator* proposes to himself, with such a degree of Evidence as it is not possible to resist. It will hence follow, That nothing can be more innocent than the Practice of the *Romanists*, in persecuting those whom they style Hereticks, and in exercising upon them all the Barbarities of the *Inquisition*. How can we refuse our assent to this, if we do but oppose two things ; First, That a Man may innocently imbrace the *Romish Religion*, as he may, if he can innocently err as to the Analysis of Faith ; and Secondly, That the *Romish Religion* warrants and authorizeth such Persecution. Upon granting these two Maxims, all the Inhumanities of Bloody Persecutors, will be render'd not only lawful, but commendable.

The *Philosophical Commentator* was sensible of this Difficulty. He has objected it to himself, though under another form which renders it less cogent and pressing. He has confess'd, that 'tis the most perplexing Instance that can be urg'd against him, (*Suppl. p. 252.*) He has attempted to reply to it, but with very little Success.

He says first, That if there are any such Errors (as no doubt there are) of which we ourselves are the cause, by our inexcusable neglect of Instruction, and our too great Complaisance to our irregular Passions, the Error of those Men who believe the literal Sense of that Text, compel them to come in, is manifestly of this Order ; so necessary it is to trample under foot a Thousand Notions of Justice and Humanity which  
daily

daily occur to all Men, before we can be persuaded that God has enjoined the exercise of such a Violence. But hence it will follow, that all the Evils inflicted on the Persecuted are really Crimes.

But 'tis easie to reply, That if Persecution in this Case appears to be unlawful, the Church of *Rome* which approves and authorises Persecution, must likewise appear not to be the Church of *Christ*. Thus whatever difficulties there may be in the Question concerning the Analysis of Faith, it will always be certain that a Man cannot innocently either embrace the *Roman* Communion, or continue in it; because this act alone of approving and authorizing Persecution demonstrates that 'tis as far distant as possible from the Character of the true Church.

He says, in the second place, that *humanly speaking*, 'tis impossible not to sin in the execution of what this Error prompts Men to, on account of that Anger and Hatred, which cannot but arise in the Minds of those who execute it. Not to say (as he goes on) that they cause the Persecuted to sin in many respects, as I have shewn in the sixth Chapter of my first Part. And this strengthens more and more the Presumption which we may fairly entertain, that these Persecutors do not indeed mistake with a good and honest Intention; and shews, that tho' they should have the extraordinary happiness of being thus involuntarily mistaken, yet they must fall into Sin by executing their false Principle.

But what I observed concerning the first Answer, may be applied to this Second: For if this take place, no Man can honestly  
either

either embrace the Religion of the Church of Rome, or continue in it, which is sufficient for my purpose.

Thirdly, he says, that *altho' this Error, together with its consequences, should be allowed the Privilege of those Evils which Men involuntarily commit, yet such as are under its possession are still obliged to use their utmost care and endeavour in correcting it. For the more Right it gives them to persecute, the more fatal it must become to Publick Society, and the more fruitful cause of infinite Misfortunes and Sins.*

But 'tis visible that this Reply does not touch my Objection. The Point is not, whether the Zeal of Persecutors, tho' innocent, ought to be restrained, but whether it be thus really innocent. And I need only say, that it cannot be so, according to the Maxims of the *Philosophical Commentator*.

Yet if the Question about the Analysis of Faith be so very difficult to be decided, as this Author would persuade us, it must prove a vain Design to labour in the Conviction of these Persecuting Spirits. For they would always oppose their Method of Authority and Prescription to whatever Arguments we could urge to prove the Injustice of their Proceedings. This Hypothesis ever returns upon the Author, and ruins the most plausible Defence that he could make for his Opinion.

I have but one Reflection to add, It is that the Writer of this *Commentary* all along supposes what he ought to prove, and what I not only believe to be false, but have evinc'd to be so in my seventh Chapter. He supposes



poses it may so happen, that a Man who does all that he is able, and all that he is obliged to do, for the attaining the knowledge of his Duty, shall still remain ignorant of it. Upon this supposition, I confess, the Ignorance of such a Person would be invincible and involuntary, and whatever it should lead him to would be innocent.

But is this Supposition certain? Is it so much as credible? Is it possible that God should leave in blindness and darkness those who sincerely seek his Light, and who beg it of him for no other use but that they may serve him, and do his Will? Is it conceivable that he should abandon those who humbly sue to him, and implore his Favour, when he so mercifully prevents such Numbers of unhappy Objects that have him not in their Thoughts, or who never think of him but to affront him?

I am very sensible what it is that has deceived this Author. He considers the discovery of Truth as the sole Effect of our Natural Penetration, and of those Lights which we either enjoy by our Parts and Sagacity, or acquire by our Labour and Study. And I confess, had we no other helps in the search of Truth, it would be very possible for us, after our utmost Application, to remain in Ignorance, or even to fall into Error. But we ought, in my judgment, to pay some regard to the Divine Assistance, and to assure our selves that there is some Truth in those many Promises which engage the Illumination, the Aid, and Direction of the Holy Spirit, to those who pay for it as they

they ought, and whose Prayers are accompanied with a sincere Love for Truth, and for him the Source and Fountain of Truth.

*The Objections answered.*

There are two principal Exceptions made against what has been here delivered. It is said, in the first place, that if the greater Probability be not sufficient, so that we must be necessarily obliged either to obtain a certain Assurance, or to take the safer side, our Lord's Yoke would be rendered so heavy that none could be able to bear it. Secondly, It is said, that the greatest part of Mankind have neither Time nor Knowledge sufficient to become Masters of Truth and Certainty, and that therefore 'tis reasonable to believe God will require nothing more than the greater Probability. *Gonet* and *Gonsales* lay the utmost stress on the first of these Reasons, and the *Philosophical Commentor* urges the second.

To the first I answer, that it may very justly be suspected; because indeed 'tis the same which the Casuists press, above all others, to shew that it is not necessary for us to be guided by the greater Probability. For on the one side, they alledge, that to find out this greater Probability is a very difficult Task, nothing being more common than to place this advantage where 'tis really wanting. And they affirm on the other side, that tho' we should once discover it, yet new perplexities would arise as to our following it in Practice, and that 'tis incomparably more

more sweet and agreeable to rest contented with a bare Probability, without examining whether it be greater or less than that of the opposite Judgment. If, therefore, we are to have so great regard to this Consideration, we must not stop at this miserable Point; we must go on to the other Extreme, which is, the Opinion of the Casuists.

I add, that the Decision here given can appear hard and insupportable only to evil Christians. If we suppose a Man a Slave to his Passions, chained down to his Interest, and fully possess'd with the Love of the World, and of its imaginary Goods, I confess nothing could seem more harsh and severe to him than such a Doctrine. But if we suppose a Man disengaged from the World, and touched with the Love of God, as all Christians ought to be, and as all those really are who have a just Title to their Name, he would not find the least uneasiness in this respect. He is ever prepared to sacrifice all things to the Love of God, and to the Observation of his Law; which being granted, the Case is much the same whether he has more or fewer occasions of making such a Sacrifice; because the Difficulty does not consist in acting agreeably to our Temper, or Disposition, but in passing from an evil Disposition to a good one.

The Difficulty here is (I say) by no means, to prefer that which we love more to that which we love less, but to love God sovereignly, and above all things. And since this Frame of Mind is essential to a true Christian, he that is such will without any regret



regret be guided by the Rule which engages him to take the safer side. As to the worldly Men, 'tis of very little importance whether they look upon this as gentle, or as rigorous, since they so stubbornly refuse to comply with those other Rules which the Gospel prescribes.

To the second Objection I return three things. First, That if all Men have not enough Light to find out the precise Truth in every Question, they may yet have enough to keep on that side which appears the safest. And 'tis thus Persons more distinguish'd by their Piety than their Knowledge, are wont to do on many Occasions.

Secondly, That we are not to charge this whole Work on the bare natural Talents of the Unlearned. We ought, in justice, to refer some part of it to the assistance of Almighty God, who, as I but now observ'd, is wont to reveal his Secrets to the Simple, when, at the same time, he hides them from the Wise and Prudent. Let Men but read his Word with Application and Diligence, while they are thus waiting for his Divine Assistance; and they can never want sufficient Knowledge to direct their Conduct.

Lastly, I say, there's a great deal of difference between asking whether 'tis possible for a Man to sin by following the greater Probability, and whether God does not sometimes graciously accept those who act in this manner, especially when they take the greater Probability for Truth and Certainty? The second of these Questions I do, by  
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no means deny, because I pretend not in the least to determine the Bounds and Measure of God's Indulgence towards his Creatures. I am contented to affirm positively the first, and am not convinced by this, or any other Objection, that I affirm it without reason.

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## C H A P. XXII.

*Whether we may be allowed to follow the more probable Opinion, when the Danger is equal on both sides?*

**T**Here remains but one Question for me to handle on this Subject. What course we ought to steer, when the danger on both sides is equal; I mean when by taking either side we must unavoidably sin, if we happen to be deceived. Are we allowed here to follow the greater Probability? or must we be satisfied with nothing less than Certainty?

If the latter, our Condition is very sad and deplorable; for there are infinite occasions in which 'tis absolutely impossible to know with Certainty how we ought to proceed: Again, in some Cases, we are necessarily obliged to determine upon the Spot, and our very delay would be sinful. To what Troubles then, to what Streights and Perplexities shall we be driven, if under these Circumstances we may not take up with the more probable Opinion; and if a full and  
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certain Knowledge, when it appears to be impossible, does yet continue to be necessary?

If the Former, (that is, if the greater Probability be sufficient) What Security shall we have, against the Danger intimated in the preceding Chapter? For 'tis very possible, that this greater Probability may in the end, be a meer Falstiy. What will be the Issue of such a Case? Either we shall not sin while we transgress the Eternal Law of God, or we shall sin while we follow the Direction of Right Reason: I mean, while we act upon the greater Probability, which in these Circumstances, is the only Light we can obtain.

This Difficulty appears considerable, and is indeed what it appears: But we may perhaps get over it, by the help of a Distinction which I have already made use of in several places, and which is the true Key to most of those Questions that can be rais'd on the Matter before us. There are two sorts of Doubts in which we may seek to be resolv'd e'er we proceed to Action. Some there are which we can clear up no farther, than by Probabilities and Conjectures; and in which we must despair of Certainty, after the most diligent Enquiries. There are others which we might remove with less danger of Mistake, if we would use all necessary Precautions for the discovery of the Truth.

In the former Class I rank all those Doubts, the Resolution of which depends upon some obscure, unknown Facts; and many of those which bear regard to Human Laws only, or to some other the like Matter. There can



no Doubt be assign'd of this Order, in which upon default of Certainty, we may not rest contented with the greater Probability.

For Instance ; A Physician knows that he ought to make choice of the most sovereign and efficacious Remedies for the Cure of his Patients : But in as much as this Efficacy depends upon the Concurrence of several Facts, which are rarely evident to him, he can but rarely have a certain Knowledge, what Prescriptions are best for each Patient in particular, and must, therefore, determine his Choice by unconvincing Reasons, and such as are, at the most, but probable.

What is more frequent in the World, than to see a whole Bench of the ablest Judges divided upon a Cause ; the Right of one of the Parties having but a very small Advantage over that of the other ? How can such a Suit be determin'd, but by allowing the more probable Claim ?

We know, that they who have the disposal of any Office or Employment, ought to prefer such Men as are most able to discharge it. We know, that they ought to make Choice of Persons of the greatest Capacity and Worth : But we do not certainly know, whether those whom we think to be the most worthy, and most capable, have really that Advantage which we ascribe to them, above others.

We may be inclin'd to assist many Persons in distress, while yet our Circumstances will not extend farther than to the relief of a few. Here we know, that on the one side, we ought to prefer the most indigent ; and

on the other side the most honest. 'But 'tis very easy for us to be deceiv'd in the Judgment we make of their Probity, and of their Necessity.

In all these Cases, and in infinite others of the like Nature, 'tis impossible for us to govern our selves by any thing more than bare Probabilities. Such Arguments are here sufficient, and provided we sincerely enquire after the Truth, and prefer that which has more appearance of it, to that which has less, we may indeed be mistaken, but we shall not sin, the Mistake into which we fall being invincible and involuntary, at least as far as any Error can be so.

With respect, therefore, to this first Class, the Question admits of no Difficulty: But 'tis otherwise, in relation to those Doubts which arise from Ignorance of the Law of Nature, and to all such, in general, as we might overcome, if we applied our due Care and Endeavour. It is more difficult to adjust the Method that ought to be observ'd on these Occasions. What seems to me to bid the fairest for Truth, is as follows.

After having examin'd these Questions, with all the Diligence and Accuracy that we are capable of, after having implor'd the Divine Assistance, after having taken the Advice of Learned and Intelligent Persons, if we do not yet find that one side has more the Advantage of the other, than in some degree of Probability; We may assure our selves, that we have not done all that we ought to do for the discovery of the Truth. And by Consequence, we are obliged, if possible, still  
to

to make new Efforts in search of that full Certainty, which alone can settle and compose our Spirit.

But since we are not always in a Condition to repair this Default, either because the Affair is urgent and pressing, or because the Opportunity which we enjoy'd of informing our selves is past, beyond recall; we have no other Course to take, but to follow the more probable Opinion.

I confess, this Expedient will not absolutely set us beyond the danger of being mistaken; and by Consequence, of sinning. I confess, this Sin will not be absolutely involuntary: But it will partake as little of our voluntary Choice as it possibly can; and we have grounds to hope, that it will meet with Pardon from God; and that such a General Repentance as, in some manner, cleanseth us from our other secret Faults, will be effectual for the obtaining the Divine Mercy for the Remission of this.

Nor is there need of any thing farther to calm the uneasiness of Conscience: For, indeed, it happens but very rarely, that we have an entire Certainty of our not sinning, in doing what we esteem to be just and innocent. A Man may say with St. Paul, at least in this respect, *I know nothing by myself*: But *i Cor. 13* then he ought to add, with the same Apostle, *14.*  
*Yet am I not hereby justified.*

Nevertheless, when we can bear this Testimony to ourselves, that we love the Truth, that we search after it, that we desire to know it, and above all, to practice it, there is good reason for us to believe, that God  
X 2 will



will bear with our Failings ; and that altho' what we act in this manner be not in it self free from some Adherency of Guilt, yet He will graciously hide it under the extensive Merit of his Son, and pardon it by his infinite Mercy, agreeably to what he declares *Mat.iii.17* by his Prophet, *I will spare (or pardon) them, as a Father spareth (or pardoneth) his own Son that serveth him.*

But it will be asked again, What are we to do, when not only the Danger is equal on both sides, but likewise the Reasons which excite in us an Apprehension of this Danger appear to be of equal Force ?

I answer : It is extreamly rare, That we do not find, either in the main Question, or in some one of those external Circumstances which accompany the Fact, a Motive to incline us the one way rather than the other : For Instance, I am afraid of sinning against Charity, if I discover a Secret, when 'tis for the good of one of my Neighbours to have it conceal'd. On the other side, I am afraid of sinning against the same Charity, if I conceal this Secret, when 'tis for the good of another of my Neighbours to have it disclosed.

Here the Balance seems to hang very even. And yet there may easily be some particular Reasons, of weight enough to turn it to the one, or to the other side ; or to speak more justly, there are so many of these Reasons which may happen, that 'tis morally impossible, but some one of them should offer it self.

If the Person, whose Interest it is that I should reveal this Secret, be the same who first acquainted and intrusted me with it; here I am convinced, that Justice (the ties of which are of a much stronger Nature than those of Charity,) obliges me not to utter it; and therefore, that whatever Good I might do to a third Person by Speaking, I ought to keep Silence.

Again, If any Duty engages me more nearly to one of these Parties than to the other; if the Interest which the one has in my Silence, the other in my Discovery, be unequal; if by declaring, or by refraining, I am capable of doing more Good to one than to the other; if the one has more Right than the other, to the Advantage which I make him lose by my Conduct in either respect: 'Tis manifest, that only one of these Considerations, or of others the like, may determine my Practice.

But suppose a Case, where we see nothing that can determine us: Here we ought to look if there be not some Medium equally remote from these Extreams. If we perceive any such Medium, we may embrace it as our Direction. For Instance, A Judge who is to end a Suit between two Parties, whose Rights seem equally to be well-grounded, not being able to give a positive Decision in favour of either Party, may make up the Business between them by Composition; and this is what the most rigid Casuists have advised.

Upon some Occasions it is lawful for us to have recourse to Lots, having first pray'd to

God, that He would be pleas'd to direct 'em in such a manner, as shall be most agreeable to the Truth, and most conducive to the advancement of his Glory. This Method I would recommend to those who, having the Disposal of an Office, know not where to fix their Choice amongst Persons who seem of equal Merit. They have the Example of the Apostles to justify them, who made use of this Expedient to fill up that Place in their Order, which, by the Despair and Apostacy of *Judas*, was become vacant.

And perhaps this is the Way that might have been taken by the Merchant of *Thessalonica*; who having but two Sons, lost them both, because he could not determine himself upon the Offer made to him by *Theodosius's* Soldiers, to spare one of them. He had nothing to do but to make his Choice, and yet he could never come to a Resolution of chusing; nor can we blame him in that respect. To decide a Question so extreamly nice and difficult, did not lie within the verge of his Power: But he might, as it seems probable, have implored the Decision of Heaven, by the means of which we are now speaking, and might have interpreted that Decision, according as the Lot should fall.

If we happen to be under such a Doubt as cannot be terminated by any of the Ways here propos'd, 'tis my Judgment that we ought to compare the two Sins into which we fear a wrong Choice may betray us, avoiding that which seems either most heinous in its Nature, or most dangerous in its Consequences.



## C H A P. XXIII.

*The Conscience ought to be resolute and inflexible.*

I Have insisted long on the Second Condition necessary to a good Judgment ; but I shall be very brief on the Third. The Conscience ought not only to be determinate and peremptory in judging, but likewise resolute and inflexible.

Some may imagine, that I am still speaking of the same thing ; but these are really different Qualities. I have shewn in the preceding Chapters, That the Conscience ought to pronounce decisively, and without Hesitation ; so that no Doubt, no Uncertainty may remain after its Sentence : But I am now contending, that it ought to admit of no Biass ; and that, when it has once a distinct Apprehension of the Truth, it ought to keep the most vigorous adherence to it, so as not to be mov'd by Interest, Passion or Complaisance. I have shewn, That it ought to be fixt and determinate ; and I am now about to prove, that it ought to be constant and inflexible.

I do not mean by this, that it should be obstinate or pertinacious : Which Caution seems the more necessary, by reason that the World is apt to reproach good and pious Men with a stubbornness of Temper, conceiving this as a Fault to which their Character is particularly Subject. It imports us

therefore, not to confound these Qualities, which are very different in themselves.

It is a Notion receiv'd by many Persons, That Constancy on the one side, and Obstinacy on the other, are most essentially distinguish'd in this, that the Former is always engag'd to Truth, the Latter always confin'd to Error : But I believe, they are under a Misapprehension in this Matter. A Man may be obstinate when he is in the right, and he may not be obstinate, and yet be in the wrong.

He that maintains a Truth, without knowing it to be a Truth, and without having any solid Reason to maintain it, is an obstinate Man. On the contrary, he that being innocently mistaken, is always ready to yield himself up to the Evidence of Truth, when it shall be made appear to him, is by no means stubborn or obstinate, not even if he defend his Error with some sort of vehemence, provided the Reasons brought against it be not just and forcible.

I conceive, therefore, that Obstinacy, or Positiveness, consists in nothing else but in a Man's being excessively tied and wedded to his own Opinions, so as not to depart from them, tho' he has no reason to persist ; nay, tho' he has reason to quit them for such are more sound and rational.

Constancy, on the other side, is a strict Engagement to such Truths as we are thoroughly acquainted with, and have a distinct view of their Reasons and Foundations : Thus Constancy proceeds wholly from the Evidence of known Truth, from its Beauty,  
its

its Usefulness, and the Advantages we may reap by following it : But Obstinacy is an effect of Pride, a vain Delusion of Self-love : In the Latter, we admire and affect not that which appears to be Truth, but our own Judgment which embraces it as such. We can by no means imagine our selves to have been deceiv'd. This is too mortifying a Thought not to be rejected as soon as it presents it self to our Mind : So that when we have once declar'd our selves upon any Subject, Men may alledge the most convincing Reasons against us, they may set the Truth in full view before our Eyes ; we shall not brook a Retractation ; we shall not be brought to confess, nor even to believe, that we were under a Mistake.

If, therefore, we would not be stubborn and pertinacious, we ought to look on all our former Judgments as nothing. We ought to be always ready to correct and reform them, when they shall appear to have been rash and unadvised. We ought to rest our selves entirely upon Evidence and Truth.

The Inflexibility which I speak of is no way repugnant to this Disposition, but on the contrary, includes the most commendable part and properties of it. Both consist in the same Love for Truth ; and the only difference between them, arises from the Diversity of the Objects by us postponed to that Truth, which in so supream a degree we love. If we give it the Advantage over our own Judgments, this constitutes the Disposition opposite to stiffness in Opinion. If we prefer it to Interest, Ambition, or other the like Objects,



Objects, it is that Firmness and Inflexibility which I am now recommending.

It is but too frequently, that we see Truth clashing with our Temporal Interests, with the secret Biass of our Hearts, with our most violent Passions, and of other things which we make the ordinary Measures of our Conduct. Whenever this happens, we ought to despise these vain Interests, to stifle these Inclinations, to repress these criminal Motions, and in all our Proceedings, to stick close to the unalterable Rule of Truth: But we cannot bring our selves to such a Resolution: On the quite contrary, we endeavour to ply and bend this Rule; and instead of conforming our selves to it, would have it conform to our selves; not being able to change it, because 'tis really constant and perpetual, our next Attempt is to change our own Judgment about it. We try to persuade our selves out of its Directions; and with much Pains and Labour, we come at length to succeed in our Design.

No Man can indeed be ignorant of that mighty Sway which the Heart bears over the Understanding. According to the Order of Nature, and the Intention of its Divine Author, 'tis the Understanding that ought to guide the Heart, and to be set up as its faithful Lamp and Light: But in common Experience, we see the Reverse of this. The Heart draws aside the Understanding that way to which it self inclines; and if it fail to do this immediately, and by absolute Command, it carries its Point by Time and Stratagem. It hinders the Intellective Power  
from

from attending to such Reasons as are disagreeable to it self, and keeps it perpetually busied about the opposite Arguments. It makes us look on the Former with a secret desire that they may prove false, and on the Latter with a most unjust wish, that we may find them true; and then no wonder if it be successful in its Arts, and if it effectually lead us into Error.

Nor is the Case with regard to such Actions only as terminate in our selves. We see the very same in those which we perform with relation to others. How many loose Directors are there in the World, who betray the Interests of Truth, by a foolish Complaisance towards the Persons under their Guidance, to whom they have not Courage enough to speak what they think? Some with a vicious Silence dissemble their Irregularities. Others carry the base Indulgence much farther, approve of these Irregularities, which they ought severely to condemn; and when consulted, return for answer, not that which they know to be true, but that which they presume will be most agreeable to those who ask their Advice.

Can we conceive any thing more detestable than this Proceeding? For what indeed are the Effects of it, or what the Wages that it brings to its Authors? They accomplish their own Ruin, and the Ruin of those who follow their pernicious Counsels. They take the Sins of the Latter on themselves, and yet do not discharge them from the Burthen, and the Guilt. They violate all the Rules of Charity, and of Justice; they run directly  
counter

counter to their Duty towards God, towards their Neighbour, and towards themselves. They are Traytors at once to Heaven, to Men, to the Truth, to their Duty, their Interest, and their Conscience.

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C H A P. XXIV.

*The Conscience ought to be Absolute, and always to see it self obey'd.*

THESE are the Measures which the Conscience ought to observe in judging : When it has once given judgment, it ought to insist upon a strict Obedience, and should never suffer its Commands to be slighted, or its Prohibitions to be transgressed.

It may perhaps be censur'd as an act of Injustice, to make the Conscience responsible for the Disobedience of the Will. It may be said, that 'tis the part of the Conscience to enjoin, and of the Will to comply ; and that the former is therefore obliged to give out Orders, but yet cannot preserve its Orders from violation or contempt.

But I know not how to admit of this excuse. I am persuaded, that if the Conscience be disobey'd in any Instance, the Fault is its own ; its Injunctions would be always executed, were they laid with sufficient strength and Vigour.

If when we were about to judge of a good Action which we had occasion to perform,  
we



we did not content our selves with pronouncing it just, if we expressly added that it was necessary, that it was profitable, that it was profitable in the supreme degree, that it highly imported us to do it, that we should cross our true Interest, and should proceed with the utmost extravagance, in losing such an opportunity; I say, if we did but press all this upon our selves, and if we press it in a firm, a resolute, and a peremptory manner, we should never decline the performance of the Action proposed to our Choice.

On the other side, if when any Temptation solicited us to offend God, we did not only pronounce the Action which it favoured to be evil and criminal, but farther to be extremely dissolute, shameful, scandalous, repugnant to true Honour and Generosity, unworthy of a Man, much more of a Christian, of fatal Consequence, and opposite to our real Interest: If by comparing as well the Dangers to which it will expose us hereafter, as the prejudice with which it will be attended at the very Moment of the Commission, with the advantage we hope to derive from it, we were once convinc'd, that all things being duly weigh'd and considered, it was infinitely more hurtful than beneficial, and that it imported us incomparably more to omit it than to perform it; we should never venture on the performance.

Indeed, there's no Instance of our doing a deliberate Action, without a secret judgment that all things being rightly calculated, it is more advantageous for us to do it, than not

to

to do it. When therefore we contradict the Motions of our own Conscience, the cause and reason of the disorder is only this, that our Conscience rests satisfied with barely pronouncing upon the justice or injustice of the Action ; whereas it ought likewise to pronounce upon its Expedience, upon its Necessity, upon the Interest which we have in the doing of it, in case it be good, and above all, upon that which is pernicious in it, and contrary to our Interests, if it be evil.

Did the Conscience proceed in this manner, it would always be obeyed ; and therefore I had reason to make it a part of the Duty of a good Conscience, that it should know how to exact an Obedience to its own Commands.

And this is what appears the more necessary, because in failure of it, two things will or may happen, which we cannot too industriously avoid. First we incur the Guilt of a very heinous Sin ; for as I have shewn in another Treatise, there are no Sins of a greater malignancy than those which we term *Sins against Conscience*, and which consist in the doing of that which we see and know to be criminal. If the Sins which we caused by Error or Ignorance may yet rise to a very guilty height, as we have evinced in a preceding Chapter ; how detestable must those appear which Men commit against their immediate Judgment and Light ? Our Saviour himself has declared, that *the Servant who knew his Lord's will*, and did not according to it, shall be *beaten with more Stripes*, than he who not knowing it, committed things *worthy of Stripes*. The

The other Mischief which we have reason to fear in sinning against Conscience, is the losing and being absolutely deprived of those feeble remains of Light, which we have thus misemploy'd and abused.

I hope to describe hereafter the manner by which this great Misfortune and Calamity arrives. But suppose it should not arrive, 'tis certain that our Conscience will at least reproach us with what we have done amiss, and by its severest lashes revenge it self upon us for our contempt of its Authority and Decrees. This is what we shall endeavour to make out in the Chapters following.

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## C H A P. XXV.

*Of the Duties of Conscience with regard to Actions already done. That the careful examination of such Actions is highly requisite.*

**H**itherto I have spoken of the Duties of Conscience, in respect of Actions to be done. It remains that I consider those Duties which have for their Objects past Actions. Now in this regard, we ought to let no such Action escape our Memory, without examining it as carefully and attentively as possible, to see whether it be such as it ought, and whether it answer to the several Obligations arising from the Privilege and Character of the Children of God, which we boast to sustain.

And



And what, indeed, can be expected from those who never acquit themselves of this Duty? Can it be hop'd that they will either obtain remission of their former Sins, or that they will correct them for the future? Ought we not to judge our selves, if we would prevent the Judgment of God? And besides, ought we not to be fully appriz'd of our Faults, e'er we can truly forsake and amend them?

But I have proved with sufficient strength in another Discourse, that this Duty is of absolute necessity; and have shewn what great Benefit we might reap from ending each Day with a strict Enquiry how it has been spent. It will be enough to observe on the present Occasion, that as there are three sorts of Actions, Good, Evil and Indifferent (I mean in their own Nature,) so the Conscience ought to pronounce upon each sort, with regard to the time past.

In the first place, it much imports us to consider, Whether such Actions as are good in their own Nature, have not been rendred Evil by our manner of performing them? This is what happens but too frequently. We pray to God, but without Attention or Devotion; we come to his House, but our Mind and our Heart come not with us, these are detained and engaged by the Objects of our Passions; we give Alms, but 'tis to procure the Reputation of being Charitable. As often as we act in this manner, we change the Nature of our Actions, and whereas they were in themselves good and commendable, we make them become evil and criminal.

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The Case being thus, whenever we perform such an Action, we ought to reflect the very next Moment, Whether this unhappiness has not really befallen us; and whether we have not indeed offended God; while our Intention was to serve and to please him? And such Reflections will put us into the justest Measures of avoiding the like Default hereafter, and of applying our selves with more exactness and caution to the Service of God, and the performance of his Will.

But this is not all; tho' upon enquiry into any Action we find it to have been *truly* good; we ought still to examine whether it was perfectly so; that is, we ought to take notice of all the Defects that might lessen and impair its Goodness. For indeed the very best of our Actions are commonly attended with a great number of Failings, which make a considerable alteration in their Goodness. They may be good at the bottom, or as to their Substance, being commanded by God; and therefore agreeable to his Holy Law. They may likewise be good in their Principle, being undertaken upon the Motions of the Love of God, and with a real Desire of pleasing him. Lastly, they may be good in their manner, being attended with such Conditions as are most necessary to them, with Faith, Humility, Alacrity, and other Qualities of the same Nature. But then all these Qualities may be very imperfect, and much below that elevated height to which we ought, in justice, to carry them.

We should, therefore, keep a strict Eye over the Defects of this last kind; on the one side, that we may learn to be humble, and to implore with fervent Devotion, the Mercy of God, which is so absolutely necessary to us; and on the other side, that we may accustom our selves by degrees, to render our Actions less imperfect hereafter.

Indeed, tho' we cannot utterly divest our selves of all these Defects, yet we may at least diminish them; and 'tis this which we are obliged to labour after. But with what success can we do it, if we understand not each in particular? And how can we understand them, if we never examine our selves in this Point, and with this Design?

As for those Actions which are in their own Nature indifferent, such as imploy the greatest part of our Life, we ought to consider whether we have not rendered them evil, by performing them upon evil Principles, and by directing them to evil Ends. This is what we are almost continually subject to, as I have shewn at large in another Tract. Indeed there is but one sole End of our Actions that can be styled lawful. Any other of whatsoever kind, is evil and unlawful, and renders the Actions by which we endeavour to compass it, vicious and criminal. And since this is so dreadful a Calamity, we ought to use our utmost care and solicitude to procure its relief; that is, on the one hand to obtain the Divine Forgiveness for what is past, as on the other, to act  
more



more regularly, and more circumspectly for the time to come.

But the principal Object of Conscience are Actions evil in their own Nature, or directly contrary to the Law of God. We ought not to let one of these pass, without condemning it by the justest severity, and without taking exact notice of whatever it contains in opposition to our Duty. 'Tis in this respect that Conscience ought to be our Accuser, our Witness, and our Judge; and the more Exactness, the more Rigour it shews in these several Offices, the more Favour, the more Indulgence, we are encouraged to hope for from the hands of God: *If we would judge our selves, we should not be judged of the Lord*, says St. Paul on this occasion.

But we ought not so lightly to dismiss this last Particular, which is of the highest concern; it will be proper to enquire a little more distinctly, by what means such an Examination may be rendered most accurate and most beneficial. And this we shall endeavour to illustrate in the Chapter which remains:

## C H A P. XXVI.

*Six particulars to which the Conscience ought to have regard in pronouncing upon past Sins.*

**I**N order to the right examination of our selves, concerning those Sins into which we have had the unhappiness to be betrayed, it will be expedient to apply our Mind to these six especial Considerations.

I. The first Consideration is, what degree of Guilt the Sin of which we accuse our selves has in it self, according to its peculiar Species, and all its essential Parts. Every one knows that Sins are not equal in this respect; some are much greater, and more heinous than others: To blaspheme against God is another thing than to revile our Neighbour: To take away a Man's Life is an higher crime than to rob him of his Goods, &c. It will be convenient, therefore, in this regard, to obtain a just Idea of what the Sin is in it self, or in its intrinsick Nature, yet so as to have a stricter Eye on those particulars which aggravate, than upon those which extenuate, and more carefully to avoid the judging too favourably, than the condemning with too much severity and rigour: For besides that, we are much more inclined to the first of these Defaults than to the second, the first is vastly the more dangerous of the two. There can be no great harm in reproaching our selves too strongly with our Evil-doings.

ings, if an excess on this be supposed possible; but it may be highly mischievous to flatter our selves, and not to take upon us that shame and censure which is justly our due.

II. The second thing which requires attention, is the precise degree of that heinousness and Malice which accrues to every Sin from the concurrence of exterior Circumstances. I have shewn in another Discourse, that these Circumstances may inhanse or diminish the Guilt of Sins almost infinitely. I have pointed out some of the most considerable amongst them, and observed how each may contribute to augment the essential intrinsic Evil of every Transgression. And therefore I shall not here resume that Subject.

III. Having thus formed a just and adequate Idea of our Sin, we should labour to apprehend its whole repugnancy to our Duty, and to the utmost extent of that Obligation which we were under to avoid it; and this we shall easily conceive, if, in the first place, we reflect on the Nature of God, that he is most perfect in Essence, most supreme in Majesty, most immense in Goodness, the Creator and Absolute Master of the World, and, by consequence, most worthy the Veneration, the Love, and the Obedience of all his Creatures.

We shall still improve our Notion, if we consider in the second place, what God has done for us. He has created, has preserved, and has redeemed us. He has given us all that we have: He has restored to us



all that we had lost. He offers to do for us whatever we can wish; indeed much more than we can either wish or conceive. He has given us his Son. He designs us for Heaven and Glory, or, rather, he designs himself for every one of us, being himself not only our Rewarder, but our Recompence.

Lastly, we shall come to a full apprehension of this Point, if we look on our selves, our own Nature and Condition. We are the Creatures of God; we are Christians, enlightened with his Knowledge and Truth; we profess our selves his Children; we glory to have been redeem'd by the precious Blood of his Son; we hope, one Day, to be the Possessors of his Kingdom. Each of these Considerations will set before us, with the utmost Evidence, our great dissimulation in committing the Sin which is now the Subject of our Reflection; and each should convince us, that there is no Punishment too severe for our Demerit.

IV. It will be of great benefit, to represent to our selves the Judgment which God makes of our Sin, and that Detestation with which he may be conceived to behold it. Amongst all the various Obliquities which the Considerations abovemention'd will lead us to discover in any particular Offence, there is not one but what distinctly falls under the Divine notice and cognisance; nay, many other guilty Circumstances which conceal themselves from our discovery, are yet open to the sight of God. But now his Holiness, and consequently, his Abhorrence

of all Sin, is as boundless as his other Perfections. How must he then abominate such our Guilt in particular, which is grievous and insupportable even to our own Remembrance? Or, what Estimation does he pass upon it, seeing it proceeds from one that boasts to be of the number of his Children?

V. It will be likewise useful to reflect, what Judgment we our selves shall make of it, either at the Hour of Death, or immediately after our Dissolution, when we are cited to appear before God's Tribunal. How odious, how frightful, how intolerable, will it then seem to our View? What Fears, what Disquiets, will it create in our Soul? How light and trivial will all those Motives be found which induced us to the Commission? And yet shall we then perceive nothing in these several Objects, but what, upon due Consideration we might discern even at present.

VI. Above all, it is necessary to take under our View the fatal Consequences of the Sin committed. These are indeed the things which demand our most serious and deep Reflection; yet I shall not prosecute them on the present occasion, having, in a distinct Treatise declared at large what Thoughts we should (in my judgment) entertain concerning them.

Thus have I recited the several Objects to which we ought to apply our Mind, as often as we are accused in Conscience of any Transgression; especially if it belong to that Order of Sins, of which *St. Paul* has declared,

1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. clared, that *They who do such things shall not enter into the kingdom of God.* And there is need of no other means effectually to engage us as well in imploring the Divine Forgiveness with all the Affections of sincere Penitents, as in taking all necessary precautions to avoid the like miscarriages in our future Course.

This is what ought indispensably to be done, but what all of us do not perform, or rather what the greatest part of us notoriously neglect. Now we may reckon four Classes of Men who are deficient in this Duty.

The first are those, who having committed Sins, perhaps the greatest of Sins, feel no rebuke or reproach of their own Heart; but under such Circumstances as, in justice, ought to make them tremble, remain as easie and undisturbed as if they had performed the most innocent Action.

The second are those, who tho' they feel some remorse at their Disobedience, yet are not touched with so strong Impressions as they ought, not fully conceiving either the vileness of their Sins, or the unhappiness of that Estate into which they are fallen.

The third are those, who while they condemn themselves severely enough in respect of some particular Transgressions, yet never cast a Thought upon some others, which are perhaps of equal malignity, but which, at least, ought not to be slighted and overlooked.

The last are those, who do not bestow sufficient Space on this Examination of their Practice,



Practice, either because they are soon weary of so disagreeable an Employment, or because they very rarely set about it, and adjourn it from time to time. And this, which soever way it comes to pass, is enough to render such a Scrutiny vain and unprofitable, or at least to hinder us from deriving all those advantages from it, which we should not fail of upon a more frequent and more assiduous Application.

I believe there is scarce any Man who has not been led into one or the other of these Defaults; and yet they are all exceeding great and dangerous, and such as we should labour with the utmost Diligence to avoid. We ought to *judge our selves*, if we would not *be judged* of the Lord. We ought to extend no Pardon, no Indulgence, to our own Failings; but then we ought not to be distrustful, nor even doubtful, of the Mercy of God. There is a vast Medium interposed between Security and Despair: For the proof and illustration of which, we have reserved the following Book.

Book

## Book III.

Of the Care which every Man ought to take of his own Conscience.

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## C H A P. I.

*That 'tis reasonable to take some care of our Conscience.*

I Am now only to speak of that Care which we ought to take of our Conscience. I suppose, therefore, before-hand, that we ought to take some care of it; and this is so evident a Truth, that I believe none will dispute it with me.

For what have we that is of greater importance to us, or more worthy of our whole Care and Endeavour? Is not this the immediate Rule of all our Actions, and the great Directress of our Life? Is not this our inward Eye, of which our Lord has told us, that if it be *single*, our *whole Body shall be full of Light*; but if it be *evil*, our *whole Body shall be full of Darknes*s?

We are wont to be careful of our Body, even to excess: We labour to render it as healthy and vigorous, as well-proportion'd, as comely and agreeable as we can: We spare no Cost, no Study and Application, in promoting

moting this Design. They who are most negligent of their Body, do not yet neglect to feed and nourish it; nor do they ever pass a Day without giving it such Refreshments as are necessary to its support.

The greatest part of Men take some care of their Mind and Understanding. A good space of their Life is imploy'd in cultivating and fortifying it, in rendring it more subtile and penetrating, more choice and fine, more extended and more solid, than it was by Nature.

Almost all are careful of their Fortune and Estate; all are careful of their Reputation, and of that which they falsely style their Honour. But can all these several Objects of our Care, be put in the Balance against Conscience only?

A very little Sagacity will enable us to observe a double difference in this respect. The first is, that the Care which Men take of their Body, their Mind, their Fortune, and their Reputation, very often proves ineffectual: They labour in it with their utmost Strength and Ability, but they labour without success. Every Day presents us with a variety of such Examples; but 'tis quite otherwise with regard to the Conscience. The care which Men take of this, if such as it ought to be, will always most infallibly succeed. Now, there are two things which create this difference.

One thing is, That when we labour about our Body, our Parts, our Estate, and good Name, we are imploy'd in Matters which  
are



are not under our Command, and which indeed have no dependence upon us. Our Blessed Saviour has told us, that we cannot *add to our Stature one Cubit*, nor so much as change one of our *Hairs to white or black* : We may say the same of those other Objects of our Care ; and every Man is convinc'd of it by his own Experience : But our Conscience is very different from all these : It is perfectly in our own Hands, and we may turn and dispose it as we think fit : At least we may do so, if we take the right course of managing it, which I shall here endeavour to explain.

Another reason of this Difference is, That in order to our succeeding in any of the former Attempts, we can only make use of our own Strength, and the Assistance of Men like our selves : And these Powers being as nothing, when they meet with the least Difficulty or Opposition, it is not strange if we imploy them to no purpose : But the Care we take about our Conscience does not owe its Success to our own Force or Conduct, or to those of other Men, but to the powerful Direction of Almighty God, who never refuses his Divine Aid to those who beg it with Humility, Love, and Affiance.

The second Difference between these Cases is, That if those of the Former kind should prove successful, yet their Success can be of no considerable Advantage to us. Let us imagine, That we could adorn our Body and Wit, with all those Qualities and Accomplishments which we seek after. Let us suppose, that we could increase our Estate, and give

give our Reputation the greatest Compass and Splendor. What real Profit could we derive from all this? Could we hereby render our selves more acceptable to God in the present World, or more happy in that which is to come? Could we hence obtain any Cure for our true and real Evils, those of our Soul? Would our Soul become more pure or more peaceable by these Acquisitions?

But the Pains which we imploy about our Conscience have a much happier Issue: For when they are successful (and as I have observ'd, they are always so, at least when rightly manag'd and applied) they make our Life more pure and innocent, our Soul more holy and well pleasing to God; they open a Spring of Joy and Comfort to our Heart, and insure to us all the Happiness of Heaven in our Eternal State.

That we ought, therefore, to take some Care of our Conscience is, as I said, so very evident, that 'twould be a needless Task to offer any thing towards its Proof. It will be much more necessary, to give a distinct Account of the Care that is requisite to this purpose. Several Branches of it might be assign'd; but having touch'd upon some of them already, I shall at present consider these four only, which appear to me the most Important.

The first Care, is to preserve our Conscience, and to hinder it from being lost and extinguish'd, how small and feeble soever.

The Second is, to enlighten it, by instructing it in the Will of God, and in all things  
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that we are concern'd to know, so that it may exactly discharge its several Functions.

The Third is, to confirm and strengthen it, by the Love of Truth and Justice.

The Fourth is, to render it calm and easie, and to make it reign in Peace, by delivering it from its Doubts and Fears, and by keeping it at the greatest distance possible from those Extreame into which its Commotions may betray it, Security and Despair.

But each of these requiring a particular Explication, they shall be prosecuted in the Course of this last Book.

## C H A P. II.

*The First Care that we ought to take of our Conscience ; we should endeavour to preserve it.*

THE First Care that we ought to take of our Conscience, is to hinder it from being lost, and to keep this Divine Fire from being extinguish'd in our Souls.

This Care must needs be just and reasonable : For Conscience is indeed the Gift of God. 'Tis the Impression of his Hand, and in some manner, it supplies his Place, whether in directing, or in judging us. We are therefore guilty of extreme Ingratitude towards our Good and Merciful God, if we voluntarily deprive our selves of this Effect of his Goodness.

Which



Which will especially appear, if we consider, That this Divine Gift is of the highest use, and the greatest Importance to us: For by what means shall we escape the danger of Sin, and secure the faithful discharge of our Duty, if we neither understand what is Sin, nor what is our Duty? And how shall we understand either, if we have no Conscience; it being the proper Office of Conscience (as was intimated at the Entrance of this Treatise,) to instruct us in our Duty, and to shew us what is contrary to our Duty? And after we have once fallen into Sin, how shall we recover our selves, and rise out of it again, as 'tis necessary we should in order to our Pardon, if our Conscience never reproach us with the Commission? And how is it possible our Conscience should reproach us, if it be extinguish'd, and as it were annihilated within us?

—Indeed, I cannot but look on the Estate of a Soul which has found means to disengage it self from all its Ties, to stop up its Lights, and to lose all feeling of Remorse, as the most frightful in the World. 'Tis the last step that can be taken towards Damnation. 'Tis the finishing stroke towards the Death of the Soul, and seems incapable of receiving a farther Addition of Horror.

But some will say, is this Calamity possible, or will God ever permit it to befall us? In replying to this Question, about which Divines are not perfectly agreed, 'tis needful to observe, that it may be interpreted in three Senses. As First, Whether a Man can extinguish the Light of Conscience, with  
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respect to some Duties, and some particular Sins, and yet preserve it intire with respect to all others. Secondly, Whether it be possible to extinguish it absolutely, and without Exception, yet for a time only ; as that the Conscience shall be laid asleep, but shall have the power of awaking hereafter. Thirdly, Whether it can be stifled and suppress'd, both universally as to the Object, and perpetually as to the Duration.

In the first of these Senses, the Question admits of no Difficulty. It is not only possible to put out the Light of Conscience, in regard to some particular Sins ; but 'tis what happens every Day, and affords a Million of unfortunate Examples : Nay, it does not only happen, that Men forbear to reproach themselves for certain Sins, but that they act them with their own Triumph and Applause, as Instances of real Goodness and Virtue. Thus our Lord foretold his Disciples, that the time should come when those who murder'd them should think they did God Service.

This is the least that we can understand by the account which the Scripture gives us of several Sinners. It tells us, that God shall *send them strong Delusion, so that they shall believe a Lie* : That he has deliver'd them up to a *reprobate Mind*, to follow the Lusts of their own Hearts : That *the God of this World has blinded their Eyes, has hardned their Heart*, has made it *wax fat and gross* : That they are *past feeling* : That their *Conscience is seared with a hot Iron* : That they have put away a good Conscience, and thence proceeded to *make Shipwrack of their Faith*. In

In the first Sense, therefore, the Question is easily solv'd ; and so I think it is in the Second : For to maintain, that 'tis impossible the Conscience should be laid asleep for any the smallest Period, is to contradict every Day's Experience, which furnishes us with too many Instances of this unhappy Case: Nay, it is inconsistent with our Lord's Discourse in his Holy Gospel, where he represents the Devil as *a strong Man*, having so absolute a Possession of some of his Slaves, as to reign in them with a profound, tho' fatal, Security. *When a strong Man keepeth his Palace, his Goods are in Peace.*

But what Doubt will it admit, that the Conscience should sometimes be in a state of Slumber, if it may sometimes be under an Atheistical state ? What force of Conscience can oppose an Atheist's Principles ? What Distinction will he acknowledge between Good and Evil ? Yet can we deny the Possibility of falling into Atheism, at least for a time, if we consider the Testimony of the Royal Prophet, *The Fool hath said in his Heart, There is no God ?* 'Tis not only from his Mouth that this impious Wretch vents his Abomination : But 'tis fix'd and rooted within him ; he speaks it in the bottom of his Heart.

Yet, if thus much be granted, I do not see how the rest can bear a Dispute : For, indeed, if a Sinner may for some time remain under such a State, why may he not remain always under it ? Is he Immortal in any Moment of his Life ? May not an Apoplexy, or some other unforeseen Accident, carry him out of the World, during this Slumber.



of his Conscience, as well as at any other Season ? So that if he has continued but an Hour in this Condition, what can the Difference of time avail him, if this Hour prove to be the last of his Life ? 'Tis then the same, as if he had lain whole Years under the Delusion.

Besides, we have but too many Instances of Sinners, whose Conduct gives us reason to think, that they are arriv'd at this desperate degree of Obduracy ; while, instead of blushing at their Crimes, they turn them into an Occasion of Pride and Vanity, and impudently boast of them before those who are ready to run with them into the same Excess.

Again, this is the Character that we have of whole Nations in *Africa* and *America*, which are represented as having sunk into the last Dregs of Barbarity. If the Accounts given of these miserable People by several Authors may be credited, they have wholly effaced the power of Conscience, and have not the least remains of it amongst them.

Lastly, Humane Nature is so corrupted and impair'd by Sin, that there is no Extravagance into which it may not be led, should it please God to abandon it to its own Strength, and much more should he permit the Devil to act upon it with that Force and Subtilty which the Holy Scriptures attribute to the Tempter.

But it will be said, the Damned themselves have some Reliques of Conscience ; and 'tis this that the greatest part of Interpreters understand by the inward Worm which never

ver dies, but is to gnaw upon them to all Eternity. And what Probability is there, that living Sinners should carry their Sin and their Obduracy beyond the Measures of Hell it self?

I am at a loss to conceive, how Men should suffer themselves to be impos'd upon by an Argument so manifestly fallacious: For first, if it held true it would prove, that Sinners could never lay aside their remorse, not so much as for one Moment, nor with regard to any one particular Sin; because there's not one Moment in which the Damned can decline the Memory of their Crimes, nor one Crime that 'tis possible for them to conceal from their own Reflexion.

But what decides this Point, in my Judgment is, that there's a very sensible Difference between the Damned, and those who yet live in their Sins. The Former have already appear'd before the Divine Tribunal. They have been Arraign'd, Convicted, and Condemn'd. Their Sentence has been Pronounc'd, and Executed: They are now actually suffering the Punishment of their Demerits. And after all this, how is it possible, that they should remain ignorant of their Sins, as they must do, if Conscience was wholly extinct in them? The Evidence of the things themselves, and that inward and most lively Apprehension which they have of them, must remove all manner of Doubt or Forgetfulness in this respect.

The Case is otherwise with living Sinners. 'Tis not impossible, but that they may continue ignorant of such Truths as tho' very



certain in their own Nature, are yet less evident to Minds blinded with Passion, and abandon'd to evil Spirits, which according to the Scripture accounts, especially imploy their Hellish Art in extinguishing all the Lights of Reason and Revelation. It seems very possible, that Persons under this state of Ignorance and Obscurity, may come at last to be wholly insensible of their Crimes?

I cannot therefore look upon it as impossible, to arrive at this pitch of Blindness and hardness of Heart : But suppose it were so, suppose Men could never stupify their Conscience in respect of all Sins without Exception, they might do this constantly with regard to many Sins. This is what happens but too frequently, and what we should always endeavour to avoid, by religiously abstaining from every thing that may be capable of producing so fatal an Effect.

Rom. i. 18. There are but too many Paths which lead to this desperate Abyss ; St. Paul has described one of them, at the beginning of his Epistle to the Romans. *The Wrath of God* (says he) *is revealed from Heaven against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men, that hold the Truth in Unrighteousness.* He tells us, God gave over the Heathens to a reprobate Mind, (or, a Mind void of Judgment,) because that when, in some measure, they knew God, they glorified him not as God. And hereby he informs us, that Spiritual Blindness is the Natural product of this kind of Impiety which consists in acting against the Light of Conscience : Inasmuch, that when Men come once to commit Sins, knowing them to be Sins,



Sins, 'tis usual for them to proceed so far as at length to make themselves believe that they are not Sins.

The same Apostle has assign'd a second Cause of this Effect, in his Words to the *Thessalonians*, *God shall send them strong Delusi-* 2 *Thess. ii.*  
*on, that they should believe a Lie.* Here he <sup>11.</sup> teaches us, That Mens Contempt and Indifference towards the Truth, brings down this just Judgment of God upon them, which is attended with an Infatuation of Spirit, and an Extinction of Conscience. Indeed, he whose Soul enjoys some Knowledge of the Truth, and yet despises it instead of loving it, and entertains only a Coldness and Indifference about, deserves to have that unprofitable Light taken from him, which while it enlighten'd his Understanding, could not inflame his Heart, the great End and Design for which it was lent him by Heaven. Nothing could be more just than a Deprivation in this Case, which is the Punishment described by the Apostle. He tells us, *God sends to such unhappy Persons strong Delusion.* Not that he interposes by a positive Act, to infatuate and harden them; but he abandons them to themselves, to the Bent and Inclination of their own Heart. He permits the Devil, who wants nothing but his Permission, to operate effectually upon their Souls, to extinguish all those Natural and Supernatural Assistances which might hinder him from the absolute Dominion and Disposal of them, and from carrying them to the last heights of Impiety.

A bare indifference towards the Truth is enough to put out all the Lights of Conscience. What then must we expect from a formal and positive Hatred of the same Truth? Can we doubt but that the latter Cause will more strongly produce the Effect of the former?

It will perhaps be ask'd, how 'tis possible we should bring our selves to hate a thing so very amiable as Truth must be acknowledg'd to be in its Nature? The reason is not difficult to comprehend. This Truth is directly opposite to our Passions. It tells us, That 'tis our Duty to hate or to despise what we chiefly love, and to love almost every thing that we are dispos'd to hate. It commands us to stifle and suppress our Vanity, our Presumption, and our Pride; to renounce the desire of Revenge, and abandon all our Criminal Pleasures, to seek Obscurity and Mortification; so that going out of our selves, and taking up our Cross, we may follow our Lord and Saviour, whither He shall please to call and to guide us. Can it seem strange, that Souls prepossess'd with Self-love, inflav'd to the most unjust Passions, immers'd in worldly Cares and Delights, should come to hate a Truth so very opposite to all their Inclinations? Is it a matter of Wonder, that they should conceive a perpetual Dislike and Aversion towards it? Lastly, Are we to be surpriz'd, if God permit them at last to become wholly ignorant of its Instructions, according to the Famous Saying of St. Austin, *Spargit infinitas cecitates super infinitas cupiditates*; It pleases God to spread infinite Clouds  
and



and darkneſs upon infinite Luſts and Deſires ?

Nay this is what comes to paſs even by a natural Cauſality. When Men have once an averſion to Truth, they quickly diſpoſſeſs themſelves of the very knowledge of it. The Heart corrupts and blinds the Underſtanding: This is what happens every Day, and with reſpect to every kind of Subjects. We ſee it continually in the Affairs of our Civil Life: Why ſhould there not be the like Inſtances in our Spiritual and Religious Concerns? Nay, it ſeems no difficult task, to repreſent the ſeveral ways and means by which this Effect is accompliſh'd. The three principal which I have obſerved are as follow.

The firſt of them is what I have ſpoken to upon another occaſion. It conſiſts in yielding a greater attention to the Reaſons which favour our Paſſions, than to thoſe which oppoſe it, and which maintain the Truth that gives us this Uneaſineſs; the latter we are wont to paſs ſlightly over, whereas we dwell upon the former, and ſtudiously bend our Mind to all that is ſpecious and plauſible in them.

The ſecond conſiſts in trying and examining nothing, but in amuſing our ſelves with wild and wandring Thoughts, the vanity of which we could eaſily diſcover if we would but ſearch them to the bottom. Let us obſerve the progreſs of this Temper: We read, or hear, ſome moſt certain and indubitable Truth, but ſuch as acquaint us too ſenſibly with our own evil Condition: For Inſtance,



that we deserve not the Names of Christians, unless we love God sincerely, and above all things, unless we restore what we unjustly detain; unless we forgive the Affronts and Injuries we have received, &c. We know our selves to be defective in these Duties; but yet we will not draw the proper and natural Conclusion from so manifest a Principle; and this is, that we are not Christians. How shall we extricate our selves from these streights!

Reason directs us to examin carefully the Proposition whence such a consequence was deduced, and to see whether it be conformable to the Word of God. But this is what we take no care to do. We are sensible that we shall not find our Accompt in it; we apprehend that this Examination will terminate in our Conviction; and therefore we take the opposite Method; we satisfy our selves with some confus'd and general Notions. We are apt to say, "If the Case be thus, who then shall be saved? Does not this way of arguing restrain the Mercy of God? Does it not defeat the Blood of Christ? Does it not evacuate the Power and Efficacy of Faith?" We don't enter into the bottom of these Reflections; we don't clear them up from that Confusion which we should certainly discover in them, upon any the least notice and view, as I have shewn in another place. And yet this Negligence is enough to make us reject positively the most establish'd Truth, and such as is most exactly agreeable to the plain Decisions of the Gospel.

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The third way is, not positively to reject the Truths which molest and disturb us, but to give over the Thoughts of them, to turn our Mind as far from them as possible, and to this end, to exercise and imploy it about Objects of another Nature. When our Conscience rebukes us, we don't complain that it accuses us unjustly, or gives us a false alarm: For then we ought to have somewhat to oppose against its Sentence; whereas indeed we have nothing. We therefore leave the Point undecided, and find some satisfaction in dismissing it from our Care.

These are the ways by which Men come at last to that desolation of Conscience, and that extinction of all its Lights, which constitutes a state of Spiritual Blindness and Obduracy. If we desire not to fall into so dreadful and so irretrievable a Misery, we must follow the quite contrary Methods. In the first place, we must do nothing that our Conscience expressly and formally condemns. We must pay a Difference to all its Prohibitions, and in it must honour and reverence the Power and Authority of God himself, whose Vicegerent it may, in some sort, be styl'd.

But this is not all; we ought to make a stop, whenever our Conscience, tho' it does not directly pronounce an Action to be unlawful, yet entertains some fear and suspicion about the lawfulness of it. How slight soever this Suspicion may be, we are not allowed to despise it, till upon full examination, we are convinced that 'tis destitute of all Ground and Reason. By proceeding o-  
therwise

therwise we run a much greater hazard than we may possibly imagine; because this very Suspicion, how slight soever, which we despise may very likely be some small relick or spark of Conscience, which by this means we shall finally waſt, and put out.

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### C H A P. III.

*The ſecond Care that every Man ought to take of his Conſcience. He muſt endeavour rightly to inform it.*

**T**HIS is the firſt care that we ought to beſtow upon our Conſcience; but this is by no means the only Care, and perhaps not the moſt important: For 'tis very ſeldom but that the Conſcience labours under ſome capital Defect; and if it does ſo, 'tis obvious that this Defect muſt, if poſſible, be removed.

One of the moſt ſignal Defects of the Conſcience is its Ignorance, or at leaſt, its incompetent ſhare of Knowledge and Light. When it happens to be under this Condition, 'tis impoſſible that it ſhould with any exactneſs perform the ſeveral Duties deſcribed in the preceding Book. For how can it pronounce, either with Equity or with Conſtancy, upon the Good or Evil of our Actions, if it underſtand not in what this Good or Evil conſiſts, what we ought to do, or what to avoid? May it not very naturally fall out, that ſuch a Conſcience ſhall ſuffer it ſelf to be impoſed upon



upon by false Appearances, shall mistake Evil for Good, and Good for Evil? If it does so, it must drive us into Sin, and it must drive us with some sort of Violence and Necessity, as I have elsewhere observed.

Besides, an uninformed Conscience may easily be abused by false Teachers; such as will sport themselves with its Simplicity, and amuse it with their Sophisms and Illusions. It will be inclined to take all their deceitful Reasons for convincing and demonstrative Arguments; and will make us, what St. Paul advises us with all possible care to avoid, like *Children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of Doctrin, by the sleight of Men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.* Ephes. iv. 14.

Lastly, in this case if we do not wholly mistake, we shall at least be under a Doubt, and shall expose our selves to perpetual uncertainty. By consequence, one of these two things will come to pass; we shall either slight our Doubt, and take that side which is most agreeable to our Inclination and Interest, without examining whether it be the safest; or we shall always take the safest without examining whether it be the most agreeable, or the most opposite, to our Inclination and Interest: Both which Methods are attended with great Inconveniences. By choosing the former, we are always in danger of sinning, or rather we are always sinning; it being properly a sin, as I have shewn in another place, to venture upon any Action, when we know not whether that which we do is Criminal or Innocent. But  
if

if we choose the latter, we put our selves upon a thousand unnecessary Violences and Rigours, and so vastly augment the difficulty of Salvation, (which of it self is so great and terrible) as to render it almost absolutely impossible.

Upon all these Accounts it is our indispensable Duty to inform our Conscience with all possible care and fidelity, and to imprint upon it the just Rules of our Practice in their utmost extent, endeavouring, as much as in us lies, neither to add to them, nor, especially, to diminish from them. 'Twas for this reason that Holy *David* applied himself so constantly and vigorously to the Meditation of the Divine Law. He made it his perpetual Business and Study, still enforcing those Endeavours with fervent Prayers to God, that he would please to instruct him in the perfect knowledge of his

Psal. xxv. Will. *Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me*  
4. *thy Paths: Open thou mine Eyes, that I may be-*  
Psa. cxix. *hold wondrous things out of thy Law.*  
18.

'Tis for the same Reason that St. *Paul* exhorts the *Ephesians* to do their utmost, that they might not be unwise, but understanding what the Will of the Lord is: and that he blames the *Hebrews* for being as yet but Infants in Knowledge; he tells the latter, that they should study to become perfect Men, such as by reason of use have their Senses exercised to discern both good and evil. And thus, again, in praying for the *Colossians*, he desires that they may be filled with the knowledge of the Will of God, in all Wisdom and Spiritual Understanding: to the end that they may walk worthy

Ephes. v.  
17.

Heb. v.  
14.

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*thy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.* Col. i. 9, 10.

But that we may come to a more distinct apprehension of this Truth, we ought to observe that there are three several ways, in which we may know the Divine Will. The first is, to know in general, and in gross, that God requires us to apply our selves to the study of Holiness, to abstain from Sin, and to follow the Rules of Piety. The second is somewhat more particular, and consists in knowing all the Parts of our Duty, all the Vertues that we ought to embrace and pursue, all the Vices that we ought to shun and decline. The third is still more particular than either, and consists in knowing what each Virtue precisely demands, in all Junctures, and under all Circumstances whatsoever.

The two former kinds of knowledge are insufficient without the third and last. Let a Man be supposed to know, (for instance) that Alms-giving is a good work; that Restitution ought to be made of what is unjustly possessed; that when he has once sworn, tho' to his loss and damage, he is bound to perform his Oath, &c. notwithstanding such his knowledge, he may find himself under a thousand particular Circumstances, where he knows not how to proceed, or what to adhere to for his direction. Thus he may know that 'tis necessary to relieve a poor Man begging his Charity; but he may not know how to proportion his Relief. He may know that he ought to restore what he possesses without

out



out a just Title; but he may not know whether 'tis just or unjust, to detain certain things which he has acquired by such ways as are neither plainly permitted, nor directly forbidden. He may know, that he ought to keep inviolably such Oaths as are truly valid and obligatory; but he may not know whether a particular Oath that he has taken be valid and obligatory or not.

Circumstances have a strange and unlimited Power in varying the Nature of Actions. The same Action attended with different Circumstances, may be either permitted, commanded, or forbidden, and consequently either innocent, necessary or criminal. For Example, Man-slaying is permitted, and therefore innocent, when we are engaged in a just War, or when we are under an absolute impossibility of otherwise defending our Life against an unjust Assailant. It is good, commendable and necessary, when the Civil Magistrate cuts off notorious Offenders, the pest and bane of Society. It is criminal, when committed by a private Person without Necessity, and for the satisfying any irregular Passion.

Thus, in order to the passing a right judgment on any particular Action, 'tis necessary we should know what each Circumstance may contribute towards the rendring it good or evil. And since these Circumstances are very numerous, and some of them do not affect all sorts of Actions with the same strength, hence arises a great multitude of Combinations, and, by consequence, as many Questions, each of which Questions has, for the  
most

most part, its peculiar Difficulties, affording matter of Enquiry to the Learned and Judicious.

This has given occasion to the introducing of a particular Science, which we term Practical Divinity, and which is no less extensive or difficult, than those other Sciences commonly taught in the Schools. I know this Science has been greatly censured and decried, by the Fault of those who have treated of it quite otherwise than they ought to have done. The greatest part of Writers have fallen into one or the other of these Defects. Many have been contented to amuze themselves with certain Metaphysical Cases, which can never happen, as *Caramuel* in particular. Others have raked together such Filth as ought to have been buried in perpetual Silence. This is wont to be charged on *Escobar*, and much more on *Thomas Sanchez*: But almost all of them have given such Decisions as are indeed abominable, and repugnant to the common Notions of Piety.

Many have been hence induced to take a disgust at this Science, and to look upon it either as useless and impertinent, or even as dangerous and pernicious. They found their prejudice upon two or three little Maxims, which as they are very equivocal, so they are misunderstood and misapplied; they lay a great stress upon a Saying of *Mons. le Fevre*, Preceptor to *Louis XIII.* that what we usually stile *Cases of Conscience*, is nothing else but an Art of *Chicanerie*, or wrangling with God Almighty. They alledge, that Piety is  
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not litigious; or does not contest about Trifles, and that an honest Man's Conscience is the best and wisest Casuist.

But to discover how very little Solidity there is in these Objections, we need only forbear the confounding of two very different things, the Science of which we are speaking, as it is in its own Nature, and in the Writings of those who have handled it with Judgment and Discretion; and the same Science as it is to be found in the Works of some Modern Casuists, who seem to have had no other Design, but that which St. Paul reprov'd in the Sorcerer *Barjesus*, of *perverting the right ways of the Lord*:

I confess, if this Study be look'd upon under the latter of these Appearances, it may with good reason be styl'd a *Chicanerie* with God Almighty: Nay, I confess, the Idea which that Term gives us of it is not frightful enough, but we ought to seek for some more forcible Expression. We ought to call it a perpetual aberration from Reason; a total defeasance of the Law and the Gospel, an Art of cheating and betraying Men, of blinding and ruining them: But then on the other side, is it not manifestly unjust to load so excellent a part of Knowledge with the Irregularities of those who have corrupted and abused it?

If Men would consider it, not as it is in the Works of *Caramuel*, *Escobar* and *Diana*, but as they might find it in the Writers of the Protestant Communion, they would see that 'tis so far from being Art of *Chicanerie* with God, as to be an admirable means of convinc-



cing a Sinner of his own Injustice and Folly, of mortifying, humbling, and even annihilating him, before the Divine Tribunal.

Nor is there any more reason to object in this Case, that Piety is not litigious, or does not contest about trifles; I own this to be the true Character of Piety; but can those Sacred Rules be look'd upon as trifles, which are all deduced from the Holy Scriptures; and which, besides, are highly conformable to the most ordinary Maxims of sound Sense,

'Tis trifling I confess, to amuse our selves with the examination of Metaphysical and impossible Cases. It is trifling likewise to determin Points by undue Arguments, such as have neither Evidence nor Solidity; but 'tis by no means trifling to search accurately into such Questions as are either necessary or useful, and never to decide them but by good Reasons, drawn from the Holy Scriptures, or from the Light of Nature, which method of Decision is certainly very possible. 'Tis far distant from trifling to inform a Man that fears God, and desires to obey him, what he ought to do, and what not to do, in pursuance of so good a Resolution. And this is what has been performed by several Authors, with great clearness and strength. He must, therefore, pass a very wrong judgment on their Labours, who shall accuse them of delivering nothing but trifles.

But 'tis said farther, an Honest Man's Conscience is the best Casuist. Here again we must distinguish, What is this Honest Man? Is he a plain uneducated Person, with-

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out the advantage of Knowledge and Study? or is he one of improved Talents and Abilities, who at the same time has a good degree of Light in his Understanding, and of the Love of God in his Heart?

If the Person be such as is represented in the latter of these Descriptions, I own, his Conscience is an excellent Casuist; but I hope two things will be granted me, at the same time. First, that this honest Man acquired all the Lights with which we suppose his Mind to be furnished, by no other means than by Study and Meditation; and consequently that Study is not so unprofitable in this respect as some would make it appear. Secondly, that the Abilities of this Honest Man can be no Rule for other Persons who are not blessed with the like. Let us allow, therefore, that some Men are so intelligent as not to want the assistance of Casuistical Writings; will it follow from hence, that such as are more Ignorant should be depriv'd of the Benefit which those Writings might convey to them?

If by an Honest Man's Conscience they mean the Conscience of one, who tho' a sincere Lover of God, yet is simple and illiterate, I maintain their Assertion to be utterly false. This Experiment may quickly be tried; 'tis but to take one of the Ignorant, tho' Pious Persons, and to propose to him some difficult Case, it will then appear what Capacity he has towards a solid Determination.

For my own part, I declare, I have made the trial more than once; and, to speak still  
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more fully and generally to this Business, I likewise declare, that in the Course of my Life I have met with very few Pious Persons, who, if they had not some extraordinary Talents, or some means of good Instruction, were not prepossessed with some false Opinion, and guided by Maxims very unsound and erroneous.

But to bring the Question to a shorter issue; if Piety were the only Qualification needful, for the complete and certain Decision of Cases of Conscience, how should it come to pass, that those Professors, whose Piety is the best attested, and the most universally acknowledged, should entertain different Persuasions of these Subjects? Yet is not this what has ever happened, and what will happen for ever? Have I not shewn in another part of this Treatise, that the most celebrated Fathers of the Church gave very different Solutions of such Questions as were agitated in their Days? Do we not see the very same amongst the Moderns? For Example, Do not the generality of *English Divines*, absolutely condemn the taking of *Interest*? Is not the famous *Joseph Hall*, whose Memory will be ever Blessed amongst us, one of the Number? Yet how many Doctors have we, and those eminently Pious, who maintain the contrary? I might say the same concerning the Observation of *a Day of Rest*, and other the like Cases, which divide the Judgments of the Learned.

I acknowledge that the Corruption of the Heart is one great obstacle to the discovery of Truth; but we must have a care of think-



ing that this is the only Obstacle to such a Discovery : For if so, those Errors which are most agreeable to the bent of our Heart, would be the most common ; whereas, they are not. For Instance, can there be any Error more suitable to the Propension of our Heart, than that which would persuade us, that we are permitted to Lie, when we cannot otherwise escape Death ? Yet the loosest Casuists are unanimous in the contrary Decision.

The greatest Difficulties that attend these Subjects, arise from the seeming equality of Reasons on both sides : And what causes this seeming equality is, that false Reasons have some kind of Lustre which strikes and dazzles the Mind. For Instance, the Difficulty we find in the case of Equivocal Speeches does not proceed from hence, that on very many Occasions such Speeches must be allow'd to be highly commodious : But the Ground of it is, That the Casuists alledge very specious Reasons in its Favour, and especially when they cite the Example of our Lord himself, who sometimes spake ambiguously, when he knew his Hearers would otherwise be offended. If we examine the Reply which has been made by the Generality of Authors to this Objection, we shall find that they are so far from solving it, as never to have apprehended it.

There is need, therefore, of some other Aids, besides those of Piety, for the right Decision of Cases of Conscience. There is need of a very distinct, and very diffusive Knowledge ; and this Knowledge is only to  
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be acquir'd by Study and Contemplation. As highly, therefore, as it imports us to have a good Conscience, of so high Importance is it to us carefully to study and contemplate those Holy Rules which ought to be the Measures of our Conduct.

I am persuaded, that the greatest part of my Readers will here oppose to me the Example of many Thousands of ignorant Persons, who are visibly in no condition to procure all these Assistances. I doubt not but they'll conceive this Objection of theirs, utterly to defeat whatever has been offer'd in this Chapter : Yet I cannot come over to their Opinion ; and I have three things to reply to it.

First, That 'tis not properly a Man's Ignorance that can excuse him, but the Inability he is under to know and discover that of which he is ignorant : Which being first laid down, I ask, Whether these Ignorant Persons are under an utter Impossibility of knowing more than they know at present, tho' they should use the utmost Care and Pains in the Attempt ? or, Whether their Negligence hinders their Information ? If the Latter, Who is there that dares engage for their Safety ? If the Former, What Benefit can hence be deriv'd to those, who enjoying a greater degree of Natural Light, and a larger portion of outward Succours, yet will not deign to make use of so extraordinary Advantages.

I add in the Second place, That whatever may be pretended on the contrary, I make no question, but that there are great num-

bers of ignorant Persons, who ruin and lose themselves by their Ignorance ; as I have strongly evinc'd in another part of this Treatise.

Lastly, I say, That before we can reason with any Solidity from the Examples of Ignorant Persons, we ought exactly to know, what Measures of Favour and Indulgence God will be pleas'd to extend to their particular Case ; what are the very last bounds that separate the Exercise of his Justice from the Vouchsafements of his Goodness and Mercy : But since we are wholly Strangers to this great Secret, we can draw no sort of Consequence from it ; and therefore ought to acquiesce in the general Maxims laid down at the beginning of this Chapter ; which import, That all Christians, without Exception, ought to apply themselves, according to their respective Capacities, to the gaining of full Instruction in the Will of God, or the Rule of their Duty.

#### C H A P. IV.

*The Third Care. We must endeavour to confirm and strengthen our Conscience by the Love of Truth and Justice.*

**B**UT still, a bare knowledge of the Truth is not sufficient : For if we either know it without loving it, or, if while we love it in some degree, we have yet a stronger Affection for Interest, Pleasure, or any



any of the other Objects of our Passions, we shall postpone it to them upon the Comparison, we shall be apt to despise and trample it under foot ; nay, we shall come to lose the very Knowledge of it, by such a general Desolation of Spirit as I describ'd in one of the preceding Chapters.

'Twill perhaps be said, That this Supposition is impossible. It will be said, that 'tis a plain Contradiction to imagine, That Truth should be known without being loved, it being indeed so amiable, as to charm all those who have Eyes to behold it. But this Objection is easily answer'd. Men may be said to know the Truth two ways. The first way, is to know in what its Nature consists, and to be able to distinguish what is true or false in any Subject. The second way, is to know the Value, the Excellency, and Usefulness of it. Learned Men are in Possession of the former way of knowing the Truth ; and 'tis that which separates them from the Vulgar and Ignorant. But some one ignorant Person, some Labourer, or Artisan, may know it incomparably better according to the latter way, than some particular Scholar ; because he esteems it above all things, and gives it the preference before all Earthly Goods ; which perhaps the Scholar does not.

I grant then, that the second way of knowing the Truth is sufficient to inspire us also with the Love of the Truth : But we cannot say thus much of the first way ; according to which, the Truth may at the same time be very well understood, and lit-

tle affected or desir'd. The Devils themselves have such a knowledge of the Truth, and that in the clearest manner ; who yet instead of Love and Esteem, entertain an utter hatred towards it. Now it was the first of these Ways that I charg'd with Insufficiency. The Second must necessarily be added to it, if we would improve our Knowledge into Love.

It is the Love of Truth that the Royal Prophet seems to glory and triumph in, and particularly in the CXIXth Psalm. Sometimes he says, *He delights himself in God's Commandments, he loves them, and will meditate in them.* Sometimes he says, they are his *Portion*. Sometimes he declares, that God's *Word is sweeter than Honey to his Mouth.* Sometimes he cries out, *O how I love thy Law ! it is my Meditation all the Day.* St. Paul is to be understood in the same Sense, when he says, he *delighted in the Law of God, after the inner Man.* And when he is describing the most profligate and abandon'd Sinners, he mentions it among other parts of their Character, that they have *not received the Love of Truth.*

ver. 47, 48.  
ver. 57.  
ver. 103.  
ver. 97.  
Rom. vii. 22.  
2 Thess. ii. 10.

We may then be assured, that we love it, when we can see nothing that we would exchange it for, tho' we had Power and Permission so to do ; when, on the contrary, we believe and are convinc'd, that it is altogether Good, and every way worthy of the Justice and Holiness of the Divine Legislator ; and when we acquiesce in it, not so much influenc'd by the greatness of his Authority, and his infinite Power, as charmed by a full Persuasion of the Beauty and Equity

ty of what he has been pleas'd to command.

Indeed, to pay an outward deference to the Commands of God, but to pay it with Regret and Reluctancy, wishing that we might be dispenc'd with, and even desiring that God had never requir'd it of us, is to pay it unprofitably ; or, according to *St. Austin*, not to pay it at all ; the Heart and Affections being the chief Instruments of obeying the Divine Will.

This Love of Truth and Justice necessarily implies an Hatred and Aversion to Sin ; which latter Disposition, as it is on the one side equally just and reasonable, so on the other side 'tis much more lively and sensible than the former. A Soul endu'd with true Piety cannot look upon Sin, especially in any heinous Instance, without Trembling and Horror.

Yet is it enough to conceive an Horror at great and enormous Transgressions ; we ought to extend it to the smallest and most inconsiderable ; and 'tis in this, as I have elsewhere observ'd, that the true delicacy and tenderness of Conscience consists. I grant we ought not to fancy an equality between the great and the small : But those which appear small in Comparison of greater, will yet appear great in themselves, and with regard to the Majesty of God, who is affronted and insulted by them, as also to those fatal Consequences with which they may be pursued. It is but just, therefore, to hate them all without Exception, and to look with a proportionable Horror and Detestation on each.

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We see what it is to have a Love for Truth and Justice ; in order to the acquitting our selves in which Duty, it is only requisite to have a Love for God : For if we love him sincerely, we shall love Truth, which is his Workmanship, and which teaches us the only way to put our selves into a Condition of pleasing him, and of gaining his Love.

Nay, 'tis only requisite to have a wise and rational Love for our selves : For then we shall not fail to love the Truth, which alone can enlighten, sanctifie, comfort us, and conduct us to the Possession of Happiness.

Or, 'tis only requisite to consider the Nature of Truth it self, to represent to our selves its Excellence, its Usefulness, its inflexible Justice, the undoubted Certainty, and perfect Holiness of all its Instructions.

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## C H A P. V.

*The Fourth Care that every Man ought to take of his Conscience ; he must use his utmost Endeavour to quiet and appease its Commotions. Five Estates of Conscience.*

**T**HE several Species of Care hitherto describ'd are all of the last Importance : Nor is that less considerable to which I am now proceeding. If we wholly neglect it, our Negligence may have the most fatal Issue ; and yet we may exercise it after so very ill

a manner, as to make it little preferable to the entire Omission. In a Word, we may be deficient, or we may exceed in this respect, several ways. Again, these Defects, and these Excesses are very frequent in the Practice of the World. It will therefore be reasonable, to spend some time in giving Light to so necessary a part of my Subject, and I hope the Reader will not disapprove of the Design.

I say, then, we should endeavour not only to preserve, to instruct, and to fortify our Conscience, but likewise to calm and appease it, and to render it as easie and quiet as possible.

All the Trouble and Commotion of Conscience consists in these two things, its *Remorse*, and its *Apprehensions*. Its *Remorse* is nothing but the Blame and Reproach which it casts upon us for our past Faults. We are convinced in our own Heart, that we ought not to have acted thus, or thus; and hence we are smitten with Grief, and cover'd with Confusion.

The Object, therefore, of *Remorse*, are our Sins consider'd in themselves, with all that is irregular, shameful, and criminal in their Nature and Circumstances. The *Apprehensions* of Conscience arise from its Reflexion on the dreadful Consequences which these Sins may probably, or rather do necessarily draw after them.

These Consequences are of two sorts. Some of them nearer and more immediate; others more remote and future. The Former overtake Sin in this Life, the Latter await

wait it in the Life to come. In the first Class may be reckon'd, the loss of the Love of God, (the Love of Complacency I mean, which is appropriated to his Children, and to these no otherwise than as they are actually engag'd in doing their Duty, and walking in the Ways of his Righteousness and Holiness,) the Divine Wrath and Displeasure; the sad Effects of the Hatred and Tyranny of the Devil; with other the like Calamities, which Sin never fails to bring upon us. In the second Class, is to be reckon'd the total and irretrievable Loss of the Supreme Good, together with all the Punishments of Eternity.

If the Conscience looks on all these Miseries as unavoidable, it falls into Despair. If it only looks on them as possible, but especially if it considers them as probable to happen, it is seiz'd with Fear, Terror and Disquiet; and these several Motions constitute that which we are wont to style Trouble of Conscience.

Remorse is not only grievous and afflicting, but it is oppressive and insupportable; especially in any long Continuance, or any violent Degree. But 'tis very just and lawful, at least when we are really Guilty of what it lays to our Charge; and then 'tis likewise very useful and salutary. Nothing can be more proper to work in us that Godly Sorrow, that Compunction of Heart, that true Repentance, which is so absolutely necessary to our Reconciliation with God: There is, therefore, but one honest way to keep our selves from feeling such Remorse,  
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and that is to avoid those Sins which are ever attended with it.

But if we have been so unfortunate as to have fallen into Sin, we ought, instead of attempting to quiet this Remorse, rather to study how we may excite and quicken it, and render it as lively and as lasting as we can. To be wholly insensible of it is indeed the last degree of Impiety, as I have shewn in several parts of this Treatise.

It is not altogether the same with those Apprehensions which usually accompany Remorse : For we ought to endeavour the delivering of our selves from those ; not by stifling them, or by despising the Evils which are their Objects ; (for this would be to slide into Security, and so to have recourse to a Remedy much worse than the Disease ; ) but by sheltering our selves against the Danger which we apprehend.

This Shelter is not impossible ; yet there can be but one way of obtaining it ; and that is, by imploring the Mercy of God, with a lively Faith, and a sincere Repentance. Indeed, the whole Gospel may be reduced to these two great Truths ; the one, That no supply of Grace is to be hop'd for by those who refuse, or neglect to make use of this Method ; the other, That the Aids of Grace will never be denied to those who lay hold on this Method, and pursue it with Sincerity and Diligence.

When we can bear Testimony to our selves, that we have discharg'd our Duty in this respect, we may be, nay we ought to be assur'd, that we have made our Peace with God, that

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we are the Objects of his Fatherly Affection; and have a certain and indisputable Right to the Glory and Happiness of Heaven. We may be satisfied, that we are in a state of Grace, that we are in the number of God's Children, that we are Adopted, Regenerated; and Justified; that we have obtain'd a full Remission of our Sins. Faith and Repentance put us into Possession of all these Noble Advantages.

Now, because such a Certainty, or Assurance, not only banishes Despair, but excludes our Fears and Apprehensions, it hence creates that Tranquillity which is usually term'd Peace and Quiet of Conscience.

But then it frequently happens on the other side, that we dare not be confident of our having fulfill'd this Condition which God requires of us. We perceive some Degree of Faith and of Repentance in our Souls; but we know not, whether the Former is lively, or whether the Latter is sincere: And consequently, we know not whether we are in a state of Sin, and of Damnation; or in a state of Grace, and of Reconciliation with God. Hence arises Doubt and Uncertainty on the one hand, and Fear or Apprehension on the other.

So that there are five principal Estates or Conditions of Conscience; Doubt, Fear, Despair, Security, and true and solid Peace. It may not be amiss to consider each of these in their Order: And since the last of them is perhaps the most imperfectly known and understood, it will be convenient to stay longer upon it, than upon the rest, and to endeavour

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your somewhat towards settling the clearest and justest Idea of it, that we can form to our selves.

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## C H A P. VI.

*Of the first Estate of Conscience, that of Doubt and Uncertainty.*

**I** Observ'd the first of these States to be a state of Doubt and Uncertainty; I describ'd it as consisting in our Inability to assure our selves, whether we are truly the Children of God or not; which must always happen, when we have no more Reason to conclude on the one side, than on the other.

This may proceed from three Causes: The first is our refusal to take that Care which is necessary for the informing our selves of our Condition. We might understand it, if we would apply our selves vigorously to the Search; but we are unwilling to be at so much pains, either because we have no great desire or concern to know what we are ignorant of, or because we are averse to Labour and Application; or because we fancy that we have other Business to do, which is more pressing, and of greater Moment.

The second Cause is Ignorance. We are very willing to be ascertain'd of our State, but we cannot be, as wanting some of those Lights which are requisite to a successful Enquiry.

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The last Cause, is the slender difference, that appears between the most advanc'd of Unregenerate, and the least advanc'd of Regenerate Men. There is certainly a difference between the two Estates of these Persons ; but then it is not so sensible as to be discern'd by all the World.

The three Causes here mention'd are equally productive of this Effect ; which is of very evil and dangerous Consequence, whence soever it may arise : For in the first place, it robs us of our Peace of Conscience, a Treasure (as we shall see hereafter) of infinite Value. Nor is it possible, that this Uncertainty should not be very grievous and afflicting, to all such as have any remaining Sense of Religion : For what indeed can be more shocking, than not to know whether we are the Objects of the Love, or of the Hatred of God ; whether he designs to give us an Inheritance with him in Heaven, or whether the evil Spirits wait for us in Hell, to allot us our part in their own everlasting Torments?

Uncertainty in general, about whatsoever Subject, is greatly incommodious. It is so in our temporal Affairs ; and there are few who in this respect would not rather chuse actually to suffer Evil, than to have their Mind thus kept in perpetual Fluctuation and Suspense, without being able to fix upon any Thought or Design. This can never be mistaken for a state of Ease and Repose : But 'tis, indeed, an assemblage of opposite Motions, which so swiftly succeed one another, as to waste and destroy the Heart,  
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their common Subject. How then can it be easie to us in the Business of our Salvation, which is no doubt the most precious of all our Interests, and to which all the rest in Conjunction are wholly disproportionate?

We must therefore endeavour to deliver our selves out of this Uncertainty, by using all necessary means for the discovery of truth. The several Obstacles above-mention'd, instead of deterring us from such an Attempt, ought, on the contrary, to animate and encourage us to it. The first of them is the Mark of horrid Wickedness and Profaneness: For what better Name can we afford to the Disposition of those Men, who do not believe, that the Interest they have to understand with Certainty the true Estate of their Heart, (and by Consequence, to know whether they ought to entertain the Hope of Heaven, or the Fear of Hell,) deserves those Cares and Pains which are requisite to the clearing up of so important a Point? Is not this, indeed, a manifest Proof, that they had no reason to doubt in the Case, but that they ought to be strongly convinced of their being under a very ill Condition, which can only supply matter to their utmost Fears?

Ignorance may seem a less criminal Obstacle, and so it really is; but then it must not be suppos'd to be entirely innocent. We are ignorant of some things, necessary to the right understanding of our selves; but why are we ignorant of them? Why do we not apply those Endeavours that are requisite to

our Information ? Is it because this Knowledge appears of little Worth and Importance ? But what can be more Noble, or Momentous ? Is it because we have other Business to engage our Thoughts ? But can we have any other so great, so necessary as this ?

Yet since this Business is of immediate Concern, and admits of no Delay ; whereas, the Attainment of all necessary Knowledge, must be leisurely and gradual, 'tis advisable for those who are not in a Condition to make a regular Search, to implore the Assistance of others, and to open their Heart to a faithful and knowing Friend, who may direct them in the discovery of their real State.

But if our Uncertainty arise from hence, That the Marks and Characters of our State are not plain and sensible enough to determine our Judgment, we ought hence to conclude, that our Regeneration is as yet but feeble and imperfect ; and consequently, that we are oblig'd to advance and consummate it, by labouring to remove those things which give us so just cause to Fear, and to increase and strengthen those which do not afford us equal Reasons of Hope and Confidence.

C H A P



## C H A P. VII.

*The Second Estate of Conscience, that of Fear and Dread.*

**I**T has been the Opinion of many, that Fear is absolutely Criminal ; and that every one is engag'd utterly to banish it from his Heart : But these Men are certainly under a Mistake. There is, indeed, one kind of Fear which must be own'd to be very evil and vicious, and which we cannot dismiss too soon : But there's another which is just and lawful ; and, in respect of this, we are most of us to be blam'd for not fearing enough.

This whole Matter depends on the Ground and Foundation of our Fear. Now our Fear may arise from two Sources. The one is, that we have not a just Idea of the Mercy of God, and of the Efficacy of our Saviour's Death. We imagine, that there are some Sins of so guilty a Nature, that 'tis impossible the extent of this Mercy should pardon them, or the Merit of this Death purge them away. We imagine, that the Sins which our Conscience reproaches us with are of this Order ; and hence we become dejected and dispirited, and sometimes even desperate, as will hereafter appear.

But such an Opinion is not only false, but it is highly sinful. It is injurious to the Divine Mercy, and to the Dignity of our Saviour. It restrains Both to the narrowest Li-

mits, whereas Both are absolutely infinite : Besides, 'tis a direct and formal Contradiction to many exprefs Declarations of the Word of God, which give us to understand, that there's no Sin, how great and heinous soever it be conceiv'd, the Remission of which we may not obtain, if we sue for it with Faith and Repentance. 'Tis on this Occasion that St. John says, *He that believeth not*

I Joh. v.  
10, 11.

*God hath made him a Liar, because he believeth not the Record that God gave of his Son : And this is the Record, that God hath given to us Eternal Life, and this Life is in his Son.*

This kind of Fear, therefore, is very irregular and unlawful, and we cannot be too industrious in suppressing the very slightest Motions of it : But the Case is very different, when our Fear arises from another Source or Principle ; and when, being persuaded in our selves, that we might be receiv'd into Favour, upon the terms of a lively Faith, and a sincere Repentance, we apprehend our selves to be as yet excluded ; because we either certainly know, or have strong Presumptions to believe, that we are utterly void of Faith and Repentance ; or at least, that what we have is not such as it ought to be ; not such as can profit us, or please God.

This Second kind of Fear is sometimes Good, and sometimes Evil. It is Good, when the Foundation of it is true and real ; it is Evil, when built upon false Notions and Conceits. If indeed we are void of Faith and Repentance, or if we have only a dead Faith, and an unfruitful Repentance, we have but too much Ground for such an Opinion of our selves,

selves, and consequently but too much reason to tremble. To be fearless under these Circumstances would not be Confidence, or Bravery, but Stupidity and Folly. For what is there that can justify and legitimate our Fear, but these two things: one, that the Evil which we apprehend is terrible in its own Nature; the other, that there is not only a possibility but a probability of its falling upon us? And do not both these visibly conspire in the Case of which we are speaking? Is not Damnation the greatest of Evils? And are we not dreadfully exposed to the danger of incurring it, while we remain destitute of Faith and Repentance, the only means by which it can be avoided?

This Fear, therefore, is lawful; and there is no other way of satisfying it, but by removing its Cause. We fear, because we do not believe and repent. We must, therefore, believe and repent, that we may not fear. This is the only Remedy for so great an Evil and Unhappiness; and all other means are most certainly ineffectual. Yet till this Remedy is applied, nay till we are assured of its due Application, the cause of our Fear subsists.

For indeed, we can by no means be said to have conquered our Fear, when we have only taken up a Resolution of believing and repenting hereafter. We ought to believe and repent this very Moment: For on the one hand, the nearest part of futurity is uncertain; and on the other, the Work of Faith and Repentance is not to be perform'd by the bare inclination of the Will. We must de-



fire and purpose it strongly, stedfastly, constantly and effectually, (as I have shewn in a particular Treatise,) and no Man can desire, or purpose it in this manner, unless, at the same time, he is a Believer and a Penitent.

But if we are mistaken in judging so feverely of our selves, if we have such a Faith as is lively, tho' weak, and such a Repentance as is sincere, tho' imperfect, our Fear is then groundless, and we ought to stifle all the risings of this Passion, by representing to our selves what the Scripture assures us with so particular force, that God *will not break the bruised Reed, nor quench the smoking Flax*: not to recite the many other Passages which confirm the same happy Truth.

For our better direction, it is needful to observe that this mistake about our selves may proceed from several Causes. Sometimes it proceeds from a very common, but very false and unreasonable Prejudice. We conceive a long, or violent Affliction to be a sensible Mark of the Divine Anger and Displeasure; we fall under such an Affliction; we are dejected and dispirited with it: and hence we rashly conclude, that we are not in a state of Grace, but are, on the contrary, the Objects of the Aversion and Wrath of God.

But nothing can be weaker than such an Imagination and Surmise; for the Holy Scripture declares to us, in almost infinite places, that Afflictions are the Lot of God's Children, and the most sensible Tokens of his Love. It tells us, that whom he loves he  
*rebukes*

*rebukes and chastens; and that if we endure* Rev. iiii.  
*his Rod, he dealeth with us, as with Sons. It* 19.  
*assures us, that we must thro' much Tribulation* Heb. xii.  
*enter into the Kingdom of God. Upon the* 7.  
*strength of which, it is incomparably more* Acts xiv.  
*rational to conclude, from our Sufferings,* 22.  
*that we are the Children of God, than to*  
*draw the contrary Inference. And there-*  
*fore St. James advises us to look on these Af-*  
*lictions, or Temptations, as matter of Joy*  
*and Comfort: My brethren, count it all Joy,* James i. 2.  
*when ye fall into divers Temptations.*

The Mistake of which we are now speaking, may likewise proceed from Melancholy. This black Humour paints all things in its own dismal Colours, makes us ever discontented with our selves, and arraigns each Movement of our Mind as evil and criminal: But, here, our Notion is apparently another thing than our Condition.

Lastly, This Error may likewise be the Effect of Ignorance: For he that is not well instructed in those Failings and Imperfections which are consistent with a Regenerate State, may think his Regeneration to be false, when it is only feeble.

The Fear which arises from any one of the three Cases here describ'd, is utterly unlawful, and we ought to use all possible Endeavours to suppress it.

## C H A P. VIII.

*The Third Estate of Conscience : Dis-  
pair.*

**D**Espair is distinguished from common Fear, first in this respect, that a smaller Evil, if apprehended as such, may be the Object of the latter, whereas the former can arise only from the apprehension of an extreme and insupportable Evil. And then again, in Fear we look upon the Evil as possible, but in Despair we consider it as absolutely inevitable.

By this Term we, therefore, understand, that exceeding horror and anxiety with which the Soul is overwhelm'd, when seeing it self threatned by some Evil of the most dreadful kind, it discerns no possible means of escaping the Danger, but rather conceives an absolute necessity of being overtaken by it.

And this cannot but happen, when Men believe themselves to be under a certainty of Damnation, and imagine that they are wholly incapable of obtaining the Mercy of God, and of being admitted to Pardon and Grace. For indeed if such a Reflection be not productive of Despair, no other can be.

The previous Causes, or Sources, from which it takes its rise, are chiefly two. The first is that which I have intimated in the Chapter immediately preceding, I mean that  
false



false Supposition sometimes entertain'd, that some Sins are utterly exclusive of Mercy and Pardon, whether on account of the heinousness of their Nature, or by reason of their Circumstances, or their Number. Indeed when this Conceit is but slight and feeble, and is joined with some suspicion of the contrary, it terminates in Fear only: But when it banishes all Doubt, and settles in a firm and obstinate Persuasion, it does not fail to cast the Party into Despair.

There is great Probability that the Despair of *Judas* arose from no other Principle but this. He could not entertain a belief that so black and horrid a Sin, as the betraying of his Master, should on any terms be forgiven. And his diffidence, tho' in it self unreasonable, yet was not without some appearance of Foundation. For if any Sin can be irremissible, it must unquestionably be this, than which none can be conceived so odious and so execrable. And yet even the despairing *Judas* was mistaken, and his Sin, howsoever enormous, or beyond all measure and size, might still have been effaced by the saving Virtue of that Innocent Blood which he betray'd, could the miserable Traytor have laid hold on it by the means of Faith and Repentance.

For, indeed, God has not made his gracious tender of Pardon to any particular Rank and Order of Sinners, but to all without exception. The precious Blood of his Son has not atoned for, and expiated, any particular species of Crimes, less heinous, and less provoking than others, but all whatsoever,

1 John i. 7. soever, without restriction or bounds: *The Blood of Jesus Christ his Son*, (says St. John) *cleanseth us from all Sin*. And consequently, to exclude our own Sins from the number of those which *the Son* has expiated, and which *the Father* will pardon, is in direct terms to contradict both, and, therefore, is wilfully to blind and infatuate our selves.

The second Cause of Despair is, another Opinion with which some Men may be prepossess'd: They may imagin that they are not only at present in an unrepenting State, but that 'tis impossible they should ever repent, as supposing themselves to have committed the Sin against the *Holy Ghost*, to which the Words of the Apostle to the *Hebrews* are usually applied, that *'tis impossible* for those who have fallen into it to be renewed again by Repentance.

This appears to have been the Conceit of unhappy *Francis Spira*, mention'd by *Sleidan*, who having thro' Cowardice disown'd the Truth, in opposition to his real Judgment, fell soon after into such a degree of Despair, as 'twas impossible to recover him from, notwithstanding all the care and pains taken by the most able Persons for that purpose. Yet 'tis very probable, that he was all this while under an Error, and that his Sin, how great soever, was far different from the Case alluded to by the Apostle. It was not wilful enough to fall under that Character. It proceeded rather from weakness and timidity than from Profaneness, and direct Contempt of the Truth. So that it seems

to

to have been the Effect of deep Melancholy, which is indeed the most frequent Origine of Despair, at least is what I have observed in all those whom I have known to labour under this great Infelicity.

This we are bound, therefore, most carefully to avoid ; first by not giving our selves up to so dangerous an Humour, and by observing the Directions which Wise and Judicious Persons shall prescribe for our Cure, especially by applying our selves to some Labour or Exercise, which shall very strongly engage our Thoughts ; than which, in my Judgment, nothing can be more useful, or more effectual on these occasions.

But farther, we ought diligently to meditate on what the Holy Scripture teaches us, concerning the infinite Mercy and Compassion of Almighty God ; and above all upon that astonishing Proof which he has been pleased to afford us of its boundless Extent, in giving to us his only Begotten Son, and in exposing him, for our sakes, to the bitter death of the Cross : For indeed this Miracle, this excess of Love, is an uncontestable evidence of the falsity of those Conceits and Prepossessions, of which we have been speaking.

Lastly, it may be of good use to consider, that 'tis extremely difficult to fix the particular Nature, and to assign to distinguishing Marks of the Sin against the Holy Ghost, and that many things are affirm'd concerning it without any solid Grounds or Reason. Very great Divines have maintained, that e'er we can know who are really guilty of this unpardon-



- pardonable Sin, we must be endued with that miraculous Gift which St. Paul terms
- 1 Cor. xii. *the discerning of Spirits*, which, tho' frequent  
 10. during the Infancy of the Church, yet has ceased for so many Ages, since its Establishment. It is very dangerous to rely on the peculiar Opinions of some certain Doctors, and thence to draw Inferences contrary to the General Rules laid down in the Word of God, such as are these which follow: *Who-*
- Rom. x. *soever calleth upon the Name of the Lord shall*  
 13. *be saved. God would not that any should perish,*  
 2 Per. iii. *but that all should come to the knowledge of Truth.*  
 9. *Have I any pleasure at all, that the wicked should*  
 Eze. xviii *die? saith the Lord God. As I live, saith the*  
 22. *Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the*  
 xxxiii. 2. *wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way*  
*and live.*

If we pay but the least attention and regard to these surprizing Declarations of the Mercy and Goodness of God, and to others which might easily be produced, it will not be difficult to apprehend, that nothing can be more unjust and unreasonable than Despair, and that 'tis prodigious how any Person should be led into it, who has but the slightest Knowledge, and but the weakest Persuasion of the first Principles of Christianity.

## C H A P. IX.

*Of the Fourth Estate of the Conscience ; a  
State of Security.*

SECURITY is a kind of false Peace, which Men flatter themselves with, very unreasonably, and upon very unsolid Foundations. There are several Species of it, and this variety proceeds from the several Causes whence it takes its Birth.

Sometimes it is the Effect of Infidelity ; as in the Case of Atheists, *Epicureans*, and Deists : For 'tis easie, indeed, to conceive, that a Man who has once found means to persuade himself, either that there is no God, or that God exerts no Care, or takes no Cognisance of Human Actions ; who believes the Soul to die with the Body, and that there is no Good to be hop'd for, no Evil to be fear'd, after Death ; I say 'tis easie to conceive that a Man who has been able to fill his Head with these wretched Delusions, should be exempted from such Apprehensions as move and influence the rest of Mankind, and consequently should enjoy a kind of false Peace, utterly different from the true.

It may likewise arise from Profane Neglect. There are wicked Men, who entertain no manner of Doubt, as to the Essence of God, the Immortality of the Soul, or the truth of what the Scripture delivers concerning a future State : But they are so taken  
up

up with the World, and its false Goods, with Sin, and its criminal Pleasure, as never to think on those great and important Subjects, which should make them tremble, or if such Thoughts at any time arise in their Mind, they find a way to get rid of them, and to plunge themselves again in their former Security and Licentiousness.

There are others who reflect more frequently on these Grand Concerns, but yet gain no advantage by their Reflections. They frame to themselves a very wrong Idea of the Mercy of God, and the Merits of our Saviour; they imagin it sufficient to have a Will and Desire to be saved, and to repeat continually in their formal Addresses to God, that indeed they have sinned against him, but that they implore his Forgiveness, and beg him to have respect to the meritorious Sufferings of his Son. They think this is to have discharged all that lies on their part, and conceive nothing else to be requisite in order to the preventing of their Ruin, so that tho' they continue Slaves to Vice, and indulge themselves in all sorts of Excess, yet still they shall be the Objects of the love of God, while upon Earth, and at length the Inheritors of his Glory and Immortality in Heaven.

Lastly, there are those who have somewhat a better Notion of what the Gospel enjoins us, in order to our Salvation. They know we cannot make the least pretence to it without Faith, and Repentance, the one such as is lively, the other such as is sincere. But tho' they are really destitute of such a  
Faith,



Faith, and such a Repentance, yet they fancy themselves to be in possession of both ; either because they are blinded with Self-love, and hindered from a just discovery of their own Heart, or because they have not laboured in the search with due Care and Application.

All these Persons may be said to enjoy some sort of Peace, but such as is not solid or real. For first it is founded upon very gross and dangerous Errors. That which lays them asleep in this manner is directly contrary to the Truth, and to the plainest Testimonies of Scripture. Whatever they may conceive, whatever they may declare, it remains infallibly certain, that there is a God, that he takes a constant inspection of our Actions in this World, and will demand an account of them in another ; that unless we truly believe in his Son, unless this Faith is accompanied with the Practice of good Works, unless we truly and sincerely repent, abandoning those Sins for which we implore the Divine Forgiveness, and passing the residue of our Life with greater Purity and Innocence, unless, I say, we exactly discharge these Duties, it will be impossible for us to hinder but that God should exclude and banish us from his blissful Presence, should plunge us into the Abyss of Misery, and assign us our Portion in eternal Torments.

Besides, I cannot easily think, that this Calm should last for any considerable time without being disturb'd by some Fears and Apprehensions. I don't say that the thing is absolutely impossible, but that 'tis exceeding

ing difficult, and by consequence exceeding rare. No doubt, the greatest part of Sinners, are from time to time surpriz'd with certain Emotions which render them very uneasie, and from which they can never gain an entire releasement. They may drive away these Thoughts which so importunately intrude themselves, but they will still return in spite of all opposition, so as to hinder their Repose from being substantial, or durable.

But let us suppose that it should never be incommoded by the least disquiet, and should attend them to their Grave, they would hence be reduc'd to a much more deplorable Condition, their Conversion being rendred more impossible, and consequently their Salvation more desperate.

For our clearer Apprehension of which Truth, we ought to observe, that Fear is commonly the first step which we take towards our Entrance into the ways of Repentance. The Threatnings of the Law, attended with the Efficacy of the Blessed Spirit, dispose us to receive and embrace with a lively Faith the Promises of the Gospel. We must first be abased with the terror and apprehension of the Judgments of God, before we can be rais'd and reliev'd by the assurances of his Mercy and Compassion. We must fully understand the unhappiness of our present State, e'er we can effectually apply our selves to the rendring it more favourable and happy.

So that whatsoever keeps us from the sense of our present Evils, and from the  
Fear

Fear of those which threaten us hereafter, must needs be a powerful Obstacle to our Conversion, and, therefore to our eternal Welfare. But Security must especially be productive of this Effect; for it entirely consists in our being insensible of those great Subjects which should make us lament at present, and tremble for the time to come, in our Ignorance of the bad Estate of our Soul, and our having no foresight of the Calamities which await us. Thus the deeper our Security is, it must prove the more fatal; and the less fearful we seem, the more abundant cause we have to fear.

It is likewise certain in Fact, that the greatest part of those who miscarry are lost by this means. Despair is not often to be charged with Men's final perishing; because indeed it is not a Case that often happens. Every Age may have some Examples of it, but none has many. Besides, most of those who fall into this sad Condition, are not pushed on by the Fear of Hell; but betray'd by their weakness, and the inability which they find in themselves to sustain the weight of some temporal Affliction under which they labour, and which seems to them more insupportable than Death, so that they are prompted to have recourse to the latter as an Asylum and Protection from what they suffered by the former.

Lastly, I think we ought not altogether to despair of the Salvation of those, who despair of it themselves, and whose Desperation does not terminate but with their Lives. For it is generally the Effect of some



alienation of Mind, which arises from some disorder in the Machine, or Frame of the Body ; and this alienation may be so very great, and so absolutely deprive a Man of the use of Reason, that the Action it puts him upon shall be entirely involuntary, and therefore shall not be imputed as Criminal. So that if the Soul, during the last Moments in which we enjoy its liberty, found it self in a good Condition, nothing hinders but that he who leaves the World in these distemper'd Circumstances, may be finally happy ; because indeed all that is thought, or said, or done, when a Man has lost his freedom, and the command of himself, passes in Moral Account as nothing.

From all which it is evident, that very few Sinners are lost by Despair ; whereas almost infinite Multitudes perish by Security. For this most unhappy Disposition of Soul, is likewise most common and frequent. It is indeed the Character of the greatest part of Sinners ; and I am persuaded that the number of those whom it leads softly to Hell, is far beyond the proportion of All that are brought thither by any other way.

Nay all other Sinners seem to me more capable of being reclaim'd and recover'd. Despair it self, if it take not away the use of Reason, is not impossible, nor indeed difficult to be cured. Those Errors which are the Grounds and Foundations of it are so visibly repugnant to infinite express Declarations of Scripture, that, in my Judgment, it requires no great labour, or address, to convince Men of the unreasonableness of such Deceptions,

ceptions, and, by consequence, to dispel and remove them. I grant that our Attempts to this purpose may happen to prove unsuccessful, as I my self have sometimes experienc'd. But then I have always observ'd the Cause of such Despair to be a manifest alienation of Mind and Sense.

The Case is very different in respect of Security, which 'tis one of the hardest tasks in the World to excite and awaken. The generality of Preachers make this their principal Aim; but see too plainly with how little good effect they labour in it. Indeed, Persons under this unhappy temper of Mind will never apply to themselves what is offer'd to alarm and terrifie them, or if they believe that the Speaker had them particularly in his View, they pass off the grave Admonition with a Jest. And thus 'tis scarce possible that they should be really advantag'd by any thing design'd for their Relief.

As they seem to have given themselves up to the power and possession of *Satan*, so he deals with them as he did with the poor *Dæmoniac*, dispossessed by our Saviour, in the Gospel. We read that the evil Spirit had struck this unhappy Creature with Deafness, so as to make him incapable of being excited by the strongest Voice, or the greatest violence of Sound. The Persons of whom we now speak are much in the same Condition. The Word of God may strike never so long outwardly upon their Ears, but it can make no inward Impression upon their Heart. They are fast asleep, and sleep, we know, is not a time of attention, or of understanding.

The Senses are lock't up ; and those Objects which would vigorously engage them at a waking Hour, can at present obtain no admission to them. Their Heart is thoroughly harden'd, and therefore altogether insensible.

Nothing can be more sad and mournful, nothing more fatal, than such an Estate, which seems most nearly resembled by that of some sick Persons, who are therefore given over, because they don't feel the Malady of which they are dying. The Recovery of such Patients is extremely rare, and not to be procured by ordinary means. It seems to require the Experience of a Miracle ; but Miracles are not the Works of every Day.

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## C H A P. X.

### *Of the last Estate of the Conscience ; that of Peace and Tranquility.*

W<sup>H</sup>at only remains to be consider'd, is Peace of Conscience. But this advantage being in all respects highly important, and at the same time being not very well understood by many Persons, I shall enlarge somewhat more upon it, than upon the other Particulars of this last Book.

And here first of all we are to take Care that we do not confound this Tranquillity of Conscience, with that which is usually styl'd Tranquillity of Mind. These two Expressions which so nearly resemble each other, are yet very different in their Sense.

Tran-



Tranquillity of Mind, is a State in which the Soul having obtain'd a perfect Mastery over the Passions, is no longer hurried away by these irregular Motions, but proceeds in all things, by the infallible Light of Truth and Justice. Now the Passions having been ever consider'd as so many Perturbations and Tempests of the Soul, it was natural to represent its Estate, when exempted from them, under the Notion of Calm and Repose. But this Estate is widely distant from that which we term Repose, or Quiet of Conscience : The Latter being properly a fixt Persuasion, that our Peace is made with God, by the Merit of our Saviour's Blood ; that God esteems us as his Children, and consequently, as the Heirs of his Glory, and his Kingdom.

Tranquillity of Mind is an Advantage which the Heathens very well understood. They speak of it upon all Occasions ; and *Seneca* in particular, has made it the Subject of a whole Treatise. But Tranquillity of Conscience is wholly a Production of Grace, not to be enjoy'd or apprehended by any but Christians. We must not therefore imitate the Language of some Authors, who treat of these two Estates, as if entirely one and the same.

It may be farther useful to distinguish this Peace of Conscience, on the one side from that Peace which we have with God, and on the other side from our Reconciliation to him. These three ways of speaking which are so much much alike, will upon a closer Inspection, appear to denote very different things : For they express three Benefits

which have a necessary Order to one another, in respect of Precedence and Consequence. Peace of Conscience is the result of our Peace with God, and our Peace with God is the immediate effect of our Reconciliation to him.

We are naturally his Enemies as we are Sinners. We are reconciled to him only by Faith: Being thus reconciled to him, we have Peace with him; and being at Peace with him, we apprehend our selves to be in Possession of this Noble Benefit, in which Apprehension our Peace of Conscience properly consists.

Our being reconciled to God, is what the Scripture usually styles our Justification. It is a Concurrence of two different Actions; the one on the part of God, the other on our part who are Sinners. On his part, God is pleas'd to pardon our Offences, and to impute to us his Son's Satisfaction. *God was in Christ* (says the Holy Apostle) *reconciling the World to himself, not imputing their Trespases unto them.* On our part, we accept the Grace of God thus offer'd to us; we consent to be judged not according to our Doings, but according to what our Saviour *Christ* has done and suffer'd for us, we receive him as our Redeemer, and oblige our selves to be hereafter govern'd by the wholesome Precepts which he has given us in his Word.

This Reconciliation is a Momentaneous Act, but the Peace which ensues upon it is a fix'd and permanent Estate, continuing thro' the whole Course of our Mortal Life, and

and not excluding the Eternity which awaits us after Death. Our Peace, therefore, is the Fruit of our Reconciliation; which St. Paul intimates when he assures us, that *being Justified by Faith* (and consequently to God) *we have Peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.* *Rom. v. 1.*

It is not impossible to be truly reconcil'd to God, and yet at the same time to be ignorant, or at least doubt of it: Nay, this is what happens but too frequently to good Men; who, therefore, are certainly at Peace with God, and yet do not enjoy Peace of Conscience; for they cannot be in Possession of this latter Happiness, till they not only have made their Peace with God, but know and are assur'd that they have made it.

But still the most important Care is not to confound this Peace of Conscience with Security. What I have already offer'd concerning the Latter, does in some sort let us into the difference between them: For it appears from that whole Discourse, that Security arises either from Error, Ignorance, or Stupidity; whereas Peace of Conscience is founded in a clear and distinct knowledge of the Truth.

Security is for the most part, the effect of those Endeavours which Men use never to think of that which may give them Disturbance, or never to think of it otherwise than in a confus'd and transient manner. Some employ their utmost skill, to repel and keep off these ungrateful Objects which would intrude into their Acquaintance. They shut their Eyes against every thing that may recall



them to their Memory. They rudely interrupt all Discourse that bears any relation to them; and carefully seek out every Amusement, that they may turn the bent of their Mind another way. Others take up with some general Reflexions, partly true and partly false. They say, we ought not to sift every thing to the very bottom; and that so scrupulous a Refinement is the ready way to Despair. Thus they are satisfied with certain confused Notions, which they apply just as they think fit; and by means of which, as they flatter themselves, so consequently they deceive themselves.

This is the most sensible Character whereby to judge of false Peace. On the contrary, that Peace which is the Portion of God's Children, is always the Fruit of attentive Consideration, and of our diligent Enquiry into the respective Reasons which we have either to hope or fear. The more time we employ, the more exactness and caution we use in this Enquiry, the greater is the Certainty that we obtain, and by consequence, the sweeter and more agreeable is the Peace that springs from it, the larger and more diffusive is the Joy and Satisfaction of our Heart.

Lastly, The common effect of false Peace, is an utter dissoluteness of Life and Manners. A Person who has found out the Art of imposing Silence on his own Conscience, ever after sins without Scruple or Remorse; he will venture upon any Crime; and abandon himself to any Lust; or if perchance he abstain from some particular Sin, and bridle  
some

some one Passion, the only reason is, because this Sin, and this Passion, are in a great measure incompatible with the Passion and Sin to which he is particularly devoted, and which have gain'd the Ascendant in his Soul.

But true Peace, on the contrary, is ever attended with a most earnest Solitude and Endeavour, to avoid all sort of Sin without Exception, and to abound in all good Works. There are two Causes which contribute almost equally to the Production of this happy Effect. The first is our Love of God, which arises from the Consideration and firm Persuasion of God's Love to us, and is one of the principal Sources whence all Peace of Conscience must be deriv'd. Indeed, every Man that enjoys this signal Happiness, has an Assurance of being belov'd by God: And whoever is well assured of his being in the Love and Favour of God, and in any measure conceives the Tendernefs, and the Miracles of this Love, cannot but be touch'd with so lively and so grateful a Sense, of the Benefit as must engage him, on his part, in a most hearty Love to God, by whom he is belov'd: And loving God, he must of necessity avoid whatsoever may offend and displease him, and apply himself wholly to the performance of all his Commands, and the doing of that which may be well-pleasing in his sight.

The other Cause and Reason of this Effect is, that so blessed a Peace has too many Charms, not to produce in us a vehement desire of keeping and securing it, and a most zealous Endeavour to avoid every thing that  
may

may interrupt or discompose it. And since there is in all Sin a natural and necessary tendency to give it disturbance, it is easy to apprehend, that every true Child of God, who possesses a quiet and peaceable Conscience, must entertain an extreme horror for Sin, and must guard his Integrity with all manner of Industry and Application.

## CH A P. XI.

*That nothing is more sweet and agreeable than Peace of Conscience.*

FROM what has been said we may, in a good measure, understand the Nature of this Divine Peace: But for our fuller Instruction, it may be of use to point out some of its most distinguishing Properties; of which it seems one of the chief, that this is the most sweet and amiable estate in the World; and that nothing entertains the Soul with so delicious, so refined a Pleasure.

This the Scripture teaches us, when it declares, by the Wise Man, that *he who is of a merry Heart has a continual Feast*. This David expresses by saying, that his Soul should be *satisfied as it were with Marrow and Fatness*; and that the *Gladness* which God had put into his Heart, was more than worldly Men were sensible of, *in the time that their Corn and their Wine increased*. This our Lord gives us to understand, in the *Apocalypse*, by that gracious Condescension, *Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if any Man hear my Voice, and open the*

Prov. xv.  
15.

Psal. lxi.  
5.

Psal. iv.7.

Rev. iii.  
20.



*the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me.* Lastly, this St. Paul more literally describes, when he styles it, *the Peace of God, which passeth all Understand-* Psal. iv. 7.  
*ing.*

We shall easily grant that it deserves these Characters, if we consider, that nothing is more agreeable to Self-love in its most natural, and most innocent Motions. Whatever gratifies Self-love must necessarily be pleasant, and nothing gratifies it more largely than this Peace of which we are treating. There is indeed no Motion of Self-love in a higher degree essential to it, than that Desire of Happiness, and that Aversion to Misery which it inspires us with. And by Consequence, this Peace necessarily implying our full Belief and Persuasion, that we shall one Day possess the Happiness which we wish, and escape the opposite Misery which we fear, cannot but be exceedingly sweet and delicious.

Besides, nothing can be more grateful to Love, than the Assurance of Love in Return. And therefore, this Peace chiefly consisting in our being persuaded, that we are lov'd by God, 'tis easy to infer, how very delightful it must be to a true Christian, whose most essential Character it is, to have no other Affection so strong as his Love to God; his loving God sovereignly, and above all things, being that which contributes most to the giving him this Quality and Denomination.

Joy is, without doubt, the sweetest and most charming of all our Passions, especially  
when

when it is solid, as arising from the Possession of a great and excellent Good, and when it is pure, as not being allay'd by any Grief, or Discontent : But Joy is necessarily included in this Peace of Conscience ; for is it possible, that we should be insur'd of the Love of God, and of all the blessed Effects naturally flowing from it, is it possible we should know, that God has pardon'd our Sins, and that he reserves his Heaven and Immortality, for our Inheritance without rejoycing ; nay, (I may say) without being transported and ravished with Joy, since *St. Peter* has styled  
*1 Pet. i. 8.* it, *rejoycing with Joy unspeakable, and full of Glory?*

Needs must this Joy be most quick and lively, this Peace most amiable and endearing, since it is able to maintain it self amidst the most cruel Torments, and most violent Pains; nay, to extinguish the Sense of these Pains, and to take off the weight of these Torments. We know what effects it produced in the Holy Martyrs. We know it made them appear easy and compos'd, smiling and pleasant, upon the Racks, and in the Flames, and inspir'd them with Sacred Hymns, under the most exquisite Horrors of Death. Shall we imagine, that a Joy capable of these Fruits does not imply somewhat Great and Noble, and very far surpassing the common measures ?

For my own part, I find less Difficulty in apprehending, that a Person truly good and pious should be calm and contented under the extremest Punishments, than that a Sinner should be so in the midst of his unlawful Pleasures : For as to the former Case, nothing appears

appears to me more natural, than that a Man should retain a stronger Sense of an infinitely precious Good of which he knows himself to be possess'd, than of an Evil light and transitory, by which he yet feels himself to be assaulted. A good Christian suffering for the Truth, is punish'd for some few Moments in one or two parts of his Body. This is certainly inconsiderable: But at the same time, he is belov'd by God, who is now actually engaged in rendring him fully and compleatly happy. What Proportion is there between the Evil which he suffers, and the Good to which he aspires? What therefore can be more just, than to condemn and disregard the Former, and to be wholly intent upon the Latter? What can be more reasonable, than under these Circumstances, to resign and abandon our selves to Joy?

But what Reflections of Comfort can be made by a wicked Man, who is in Possession of such Goods alone as he is sure of losing shortly, and may be depriv'd of them this very Moment, of such Goods as are so many Snares of the Devil, so many Stratagems by which that Enemy is labouring to make him eternally miserable? He knows or ought to know, that God detests and abhors him, and reserves for him no Portion but that of endless Torments: Knowing all this, or not being able to remain wholly ignorant of it, how is it possible he should taste of Joy, or feel the least Motion of Complacency and Delight?

It will perhaps be said, that the Security in which such a Person lives, will produce in him



him the same Effect that true Peace produces in the Children of God : But I have three things to return to this Objection. First, That all Sinners are not sunk into Security. There are some of them who fear and tremble, and whose Conscience never allows them the least truce or repose. Can it be denied, but that these at least are sensibly miserable ? And may we not justly conceive an infinite distance between the state of such Persons, and that of a true Child of God, fully convinced of the Divine Affection and Favour ?

But I add in the second place, That if not all profane Persons in general, yet the greatest part of them have at some Seasons, and from time to time, some Alarms of Conscience. It is impossible, or at least extremely difficult, but that some unforeseen Object should, in spite of all their Endeavours, put them upon the thought of their dreadful Condition, and of the danger which they run of eternally perishing. If it be thus with them, they cannot be otherwise than miserable while these Reflexions last ; and consequently their Estate will bear no comparison with that of good Men, who know that they have nothing to fear, being God's Children, and being assur'd of the Favour and Protection of their Merciful Father.

But let it be granted, that there are some who have found means absolutely to stifle, and as it were to annihilate, their Conscience. Let it be granted farther, that they abundantly possess those things of which they are chiefly enamour'd ; as Health, Pleasure, Riches and Honours. They certainly know  
thus

thus much, that they must die : But let them frame what Idea they please, either of Death, or of the state which follows upon it ; 'tis impossible but that such an Idea must be frightful and afflicting to them ; 'tis impossible but that it should impoyson all their Delight, and by consequence reduce them to actual Misery.

It is far otherwise with a true Child of God, who is strongly persuaded of his Heavenly Father's Love, Tendernefs, and Indulgence. Nothing can give him the least pain or uneasiness in Time, or in Eternity ; but which way soever he casts his Eyes, he sees all things conspiring to make his Joy and his Consolation abound.

## C H A P. XII.

*That this inward Peace is highly useful and salutary.*

**I**T is a good Advance in our knowledge of this Peace, to have seen that it is sweet and agreeable. Yet this is not enough to make us comprehend its universal Excellence. Agreeableness without Use is but a mean Advantage, and such as the Wise and Judicious are willing to decline. We must add therefore, that as this Peace is charmingly pleasant, so it is greatly profitable. And here by Profit, I mean that which is truly such, that which consists in promoting our Eternal Welfare, and rendring the Possession of it more easy, and more secure : So that what I would say amounts to this, that the Peace  
of

of which we are now treating is one of the most effectual means to set us forward in our way to Heaven.

I know there are many who do not agree with me in this Opinion, and who maintain on the contrary, that the Fear which stands opposite to this Peace is highly beneficial, as producing in us an holy Sollicitude, which suffers us to neglects nothing that may be serviceable to our Salvation; whereas, according to them, Peace naturally degenerates into Security, and in the end ruins those who give themselves up to it.

But I cannot come over to their Sentiments, I am persuaded, on the other side, that this Peace, if supposed to be such as I conceive it, and as I have describ'd it in the preceding Chapters, is very Useful and Salutary. I have many Reasons which convince me, beyond all Suspicion or Doubt.

My first Reason I take from what we read of it in the Holy Scripture. We find it there represented as one of the highest Advantages of God's Children. What, for Instance, can be more express than the Words of St. Paul to the *Philippians*. *The Peace of God, which passeth all Understanding, shall keep your Hearts and Minds through Christ Jesus?* Could the Apostle have told us with more clearness or strength, that this Peace is useful and beneficial to us, than by assuring us, that it is the great Instrument of our Perseverance; and of preserving our Sacred Union with our Lord *Jesus Christ*, the Author and Fountain of our Salvation?

Would



Would our Lord himself have made it one of the most essential Clauses of his last Will and Testament, declaring to his Apostles, and in them to all *Christians, Peace I leave with you, my Peace I give unto you; not as the World giveth* *Joh. xiv. 27.* *give I unto you; if it were only a Snare to deceive and to destroy us?*

Could it, without this Use and Benefit, be the Work of the Holy Spirit, as it certainly is? *The Fruit of the Spirit is Love, Joy, Peace, &c.* *ver. 22.* says the Apostle to the *Galatians*; and to the *Romans, The Kingdom of God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteousness and Peace, and Joy in* *cap. xiv. 17.* *the Holy Ghost.* Indeed it consists in nothing else, but in our assurance that we are of the Children of God; and 'tis the Holy Spirit that continually worketh in us this Assurance, according to that of *St. Paul, The Spirit it self* *Rom. viii. 16.* *beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God.* Is it not highly injurious to this Divine Spirit, to affirm, That what he graciously operates in the Souls which he is pleas'd to inhabit, tends to the hindrance of their Salvation.

Were such an Assurance really pernicious, would *St. Paul* have made his Possession of it a matter of Triumph? Would he have express'd himself with so peculiar Force on the Occasion? *I know whom I have believed, and* *2 Tim. i. 12.* *am persuaded, that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that Day. I have* *cap. iv. 7.* *fought a good Fight, I have finish'd my Course, I have kept the Faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness. I was before a* *1 Tim. i. 13.* *Blasphemer, and a Persecutor, and Injurious; but I obtained Mercy. I am crucified with Christ; Gal. ii. 20.* *nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in*

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me;

*me ; and the Life which I now live in the Flesh, I live by the Faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

When we alledge the Example of this Apostle as a bare Evidence of Fact, to shew that a Believer may be assur'd of his being truly such, and by consequence, a Child of God, we are told by those of the opposite Opinion, that this was a particular Privilege of this Holy Apostle, and vouchsafed to him by the means of extraordinary Revelation, and therefore can be no Proof in respect of all good Men in general. I shall not stay at present to examine the Solidity of this Reply ; because, indeed, I am not here treating of the Question to which it belongs. I shall content my self with observing, that if such a Persuasion, or Assurance, be dangerous and fatal in its Effects, it must be a very strange and unheard-of Privilege. All Privileges are essentially favourable and advantageous. Those which are granted to us by God himself are infinitely precious and inestimable ; and therefore since this is confess'd to be one of the number, it must likewise be confess'd to be of great Advantage and Use.

Nor is it difficult to mark out the peculiar Uses and Benefits of this happy Peace. They are, indeed, visible and notorious : For nothing is more effectual than it, together with the Persuasion which it includes, to inspire us with a lively and affectionate Gratitude. Who can doubt but that one of the Blessings for which we are especially bound to give thanks to God, is the Grace of Regeneration, which confers on us the Glorious Character of his Children ? This was St. *John's* Sense, when  
he



he broke out into that Expression of Wonder ;  
*Behold what manner of Love the Father hath be- 1 Joh. iii.  
 stowed upon us, that we should be called the Sons of 1.  
 God ! This was St. Peter's, in that of Thankf-  
 giving, Blessed be the God and Father of our 1 Pet. i. 3.  
 Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abun-  
 dant Mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope,  
 by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

But I would ask, how'tis possible we should  
 thank God for the Grace of Regeneration, if  
 we doubt whether we have receiv'd it, or not ;  
 or, how we can say to him, *Abba, Father*, if we  
 have no Assurance of our being his Sons.

Gratitude is one of the most plentiful Sour-  
 ces and Fountains of our Love. St. John has  
 instructed us in this Truth : *We love him (says 1 Joh. iv.  
 that blessed Apostle) because he first loved us. 19.  
 Indeed, there is nothing to be conceiv'd that  
 can more forcibly excite us to the Love of God,  
 than the Consideration of his Love to us : And  
 therefore, this Peace including in it a necessa-  
 ry Persuasion of the Divine Love towards us,  
 has a visible power and influence to engage us  
 in all humble and dutiful Affection towards  
 the Divine Majesty.*

Christian Hope is one of the most excellent  
 and accomplish'd Vertues requir'd by the Go-  
 spel ; witness that blessed Association in which  
 St. Paul has join'd it with Faith and Charity,  
 assuring us, that *these three abide*. Yet it is  
 most true, that our Persuasion of the Love of  
 God towards us is highly conducive to the  
 strengthening of our Hope : For in what does  
 this Virtue consist, but in an earnest and pas-  
 sionate Expectation of Eternal Happiness ?  
 And what can more effectually dispose us to  
 an Expectation of such Happiness, than a firm



belief that God will graciously bestow it on us ? This was the Judgment of St. *Paul*, when he declar'd to the *Romans*, *Hope maketh not ashamed*, *Rom. v. 5. because the Love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.* For the *Love of God*, of which the Apostle here speaks, is not our Love to God, but his Love to us, the Assurance of which he creates in us by his Holy Spirit.

Lastly, It cannot be denied, but that Consolation under our Afflictions is a Benefit most exquisite in it self, and most able to make us persevere in the Faith and Love of God. But at the same time nothing certainly is so proper to comfort us under any Afflictions, than our firm Persuasion that they are not the Punishments of a severe Judge, but the Chastisements of a merciful Father, inflicting on us only to reduce and reclaim us to our Duty : And how can we entertain such a Persuasion, if we are doubtful as to our present Condition, and know not whether God has Regenerated us by his Grace, or whether we still languish under the Corruptions of our Nature.

Nothing, therefore, is more useful, nothing more salutary, than this inward Peace; nothing can be more powerful in advancing the work of our everlasting Happiness. 'Tis in vain, therefore, to alledge, that it is productive of Supineness and Negligence. The Objection holds true with regard to Security, which is indeed followed by Negligence as its proper and natural effect. But the Peace of which we have been discoursing is always accompanied with such a holy Solitude and Care, as hinders us from offending in any Instance, the God whom we love, and by whom we know our selves to be tenderly and affectionately belov'd ; as I have evinced in the tenth Chapter of this Book.

CHAP.

## C H A P. XIII.

*That Peace of Conscience is, an Advantage which may be acquir'd and possess'd.*

**I**T appears from the Sum of what has been hitherto offer'd, that Peace of Conscience is in all respect a great and excellent Good : But to what purpose should we apprehend its Excellence, if we were incapable of possessing and enjoying it, or if we were so upon Earth at least, and during this Mortal Life ? What could be the end of such a Knowledge, but to give us a more quick and lively Sense of our Misery, in being depriv'd of the known Excellence and Happiness ? It concerns us, therefore, to enquire, whether upon our due Application and Endeavour, we may be able to arrive at this most desirable Attainment.

And this, in my Judgment, will admit of no Difficulty. It amounts indeed to no more than this, to know, whether a Believer may be assured, that he is truly such, that he is of the number of God's Children, that he is Converted, Regenerated, Justified, and put into a state of Grace ; for, as I have elsewhere observ'd, all these Expressions concur in one and the same thing. But now this is what appears to me to be certain and incontestable.

In the first place, we have many Examples of those who have been possess'd of this Assurance and Certainty. Such was Holy *David* ; witness that Declaration of his ; *I acknowledged psal.xxxii my Sin unto thee, and mine Iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my Transgressions unto the Lord, and so thou forgavest the Wickedness of my Sin.* Such was *St. Paul*, according to his

own Testimony recited in my last Chapter. Such was the Converted Thief, because he could not possibly doubt of the Truth of our Lord's Promise, *to day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.* Such was the Man sick of the Palsy, whom our Saviour reliev'd with those comfortable Words, *Son, be of good cheer, thy Sins are forgiven thee.* Such was the Penitent Woman, on whom he pronounced the like Form of Absolution. All these are irrefragable and undeniable Instances.

But to advance somewhat that shall be more general. Does not St. Paul affirm of all the Faithful, that the Holy Spirit assures them of their being the Children of God? *The Spirit it self* (says he) *beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God.* Does he not declare of all Christians, that *the Love of God is shed abroad in their Hearts, by the Holy Ghost, which is given to them?* Is it not St. John's Assertion, *Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit?* And in another place, *Hereby we know that we are of the Truth, and shall assure our Hearts before him: For if* (as he goes on) *our Heart condemn us, God is greater than our Heart, and knoweth all things?* Do not all these Texts imply, that the Persuasion of which we speak is common to all true Believers?

Yet we have still a more decisive Proof. If it had been impossible to know with certainty, that we are the Children of God, would St. Paul have commanded us to seek after such a Knowledge? Would he have charged us with so much Force and Earnestness, *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the Faith, prove your own selves; know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be Reprobates?* Here



Here the Apostle would have us obtain an Assurance of two things; whether we are in the Faith; and whether *Jesus Christ* is in us; both which come to one and the same. For first, the Faith which he speaks of is certainly a lively Faith. If he meant such a Faith as might possibly be Dead, he would not have enjoin'd us to examine and prove our selves, that we might be assur'd of our possessing it. For besides, that we should be very little gainers by the Discovery, we might indeed make it without examination, and by immediate Sense. He speaks, therefore, of a lively Faith, the true marks of which do not altogether so easily offer themselves. In the second place, he obliges us to know, whether *Jesus Christ* dwelleth in us. But thus much we all know, that *Jesus Christ* dwelleth only in Good and Holy Men. For which Truth we have the Testimony of the same Apostle: *I am* (says Gal.ii.20. he) *crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

It is plain therefore, that St. Paul would have us search and examine whether we are in a State of Grace, as we certainly are, if, on the one side, we are in the Faith, and if, on the other side, we are honour'd with the Presence and Inhabitation of *Jesus Christ*. He requires the very same of those who come to the Holy Communion; he bids them examine themselves, to find whether they are in a condition of communicating worthily and effectually. But 'tis evident no Man can communicate worthily and effectually who is not in a

State of Grace. This Point admits of no difficulty ; we are bound, then, to examin our selves whether we are in such a state, and, by consequence, it is possible for us to gain an assurance of our being so, since we cannot conceive our selves under the least obligation to seek what 'tis impossible for us to find.

Let us suppose it thus impossible for us to discover that we are in a state of Grace, to what purpose are all our Enquiries about it ? Would not all our Cares and Labours in this respect be idle and unprofitable ? Or, can we imagin that *St. Paul* would engage us in a useless search, a vain and unfruitful Application ?

But there are two other Remarks which may still be offer'd, upon these two places of the Apostle ; for in the former he does not think it sufficient to prescribe Self-examination to Believers ; but he demands of them, with an Expression of Wonder, whether 'tis possible for them not to know that *Jesus Christ* dwelleth in them ? Whence we learn, that it is not only possible for us to know when *Jesus Christ* dwelleth in us, but that 'tis strange and astonishing, if we are ignorant of it. This is visibly the Sense and Import of that passage.

Astot'other Passage, the manner of *St. Paul's* Expression gives us plainly to understand, that the Resolution we ought to take, of approaching the Lord's Table, depends upon the success of that previous Examination which the Apostle here enjoins ; that is, if we find our selves rightly disposed we ought to come, if on the contrary, we find our selves under evil dispositions, we ought to forbear. It must therefore be possible for us to know by examining our selves, how we are disposed. And since

since our good Dispositions consist in our being at present in a state of Grace, we must necessarily be capable of knowing, whether we are in such a State.

To conclude, I cannot apprehend how it should become impossible for us to be ascertain'd of the State in which we now are. No Man will deny but that there is the widest difference between the Dispositions, Thoughts and Actions of those who are engag'd in the Slavery of Sin. Nor can it be denied, but that the Holy Scripture has exactly mark'd out this difference to us. Why, then, should we not be able to find in our own Souls the Tokens and Characters of one or the other of these Estates? Why should we not be able to conclude with Certainty, that we are, or that we are not, the Children of God?

Because, (say some) there are many who deceive themselves, fancying that they are God's Children, when they are not. It must be owned, that this is but too common in Fact, and that every Day presents us with too great a number of unhappy Examples. But then I deny the Consequence which they would draw from this Fact. The Error of those who are thus deceiv'd, can by no means ruin the Certainty of those who are not deceiv'd; and no Man could ever be certain as to any Subject about which any Man was mistaken, all Certainty must be banished out of the World, and there could be no assurance of any thing; because there's nothing indeed, but what, to many Persons, is the occasion of mistake.

There are thousands who falsely and vainly imagine, that they are learned, that they are Wise, that they abound in Wealth, or in  
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Reputation ; Does it hence follow, that such as are really possess'd of these Advantages, cannot be sensible of their own Happiness?

In like manner, 'tis very possible, that many Persons may deceive themselves, in vainly imagining that they are of the number of the Children of God ; and that many others may be assured that they do not deceive themselves in entertaining the same Persuasion. The former may very possibly run away with this Notion, without the least colour or grounds. The latter, on the contrary, may embrace it upon the best Reasons and Foundations ; and since they can perceive and see these Reasons, since they can fathom their depth, and can feel their force, there can be no absurdity in maintaining, not only that they are certain of their own Estate, but likewise that they know why they are thus certain, which cannot be said of the former. But this will be still more clear and evident, if we observe after what particular manner both the one and the other conceive such a Persuasion ; which I shall endeavour to illustrate in the following Chapter.

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#### C H A P. XIV.

*Upon what Foundations we ought to believe that we have made our Peace with God, and are of the Number of his Children. That it is not sufficient to relie wholly on the infinite extent of God's Mercy, and the Efficacy of our Saviour's Death.*

**H**AVING seen, by the Chapter immediately preceding, that this Peace of Conscience is

is not impossible to be possess'd, it only remains that we enquire, how, and by what Method we may arrive at so noble an Acquisition.

And here first of all, we must beware of the Error of those who imagine, that in order to the settling and appeasing all their disquiet of Conscience, they need only reflect, that God is infinitely Merciful, and that his Blessed Son has by his precious Death made a perfect propiation and satisfaction for all our Sins, of whatsoever degree. This Conceit on the one side is so false and ridiculous, that we could scarce believe it should enter into the Mind of Man, did we not every Day see a multitude of Persons who are carried away with the Delusion; and on the other side is so very dangerous, that we cannot take too much pains in laying open its Absurdity.

But before we proceed in this Attempt, we ought to observe, that there's a great deal of difference between the saying, that to allay the troubles of Conscience, it is absolutely necessary to have respect to the Mercy of God, and to the Merit of his Son; and the affirming that this bare respect, or regard, is sufficient, and that nothing else is requir'd on our part. The first of these two Propositions is most infallibly certain; for what possibility is there of our obtaining the least ease and quiet of Mind, if we do not habitually know, and even actually consider, that the Divine Mercies are infinite, and that our Lord *Jesus Christ* has aton'd for our Sins by his precious Blood? Can we be ignorant that we are Sinners, that the Sins we have committed deserve the utmost Punishment, and that if God should deal  
with

with us according to the Rules of his strict and severe Justice, he might ruin and destroy us, might render us miserable to all Eternity? To release our selves from these so just Objects of our Fear, we must of necessity repose our Spirit upon that boundless Mercy of God, which will not suffer him to reject the greatest of Sinners, provided they truly repent and humbly implore his Grace; and upon the Saving-Virtue of his Son's Blood, who has expiated all our Sins, without exception, and has fully and perfectly satisfied his Fathers Justice for the Guilt of them all.

But altho' such a Persuasion be absolutely necessary, yet is it certainly insufficient. It would, I confess, suffice, if God were so merciful, or rather so easie and indulgent, as to extend his Grace indifferently to all Sinners whatsoever, even to the impenitent and unbelieving, and if our Saviour had made satisfaction absolutely and unconditionally for the Sins of Mankind: But since all this is utterly false, since there's no Man who believes or asserts it, since all Christians of all Sects and Denominations agree in the contrary Judgment, 'tis plain we must seek some additional means to fix and settle our selves upon, in our great Affair.

It is the constant and universal Belief of Christians, that there is no reserve of Mercy for such as obstinately persist in impenitence and incredulity. It is on every side confest, that Faith and Repentance are two Conditions absolutely and indispensably necessary to render us the Object of God's Mercy, and to give us an Interest in our Lord's Satisfaction; but this is not all: For, since there is a double



ble Faith, and a two-fold Repentance, the former either lively or dead; the latter either sincere, and leading to Amendment, or vain and unprofitable, and such as leaves the Sinner under the Corruption and Slavery of Vice; it is farther agreed, that in order to our obtaining the remission of our Sins, there is not only a necessity of Faith and Repentance, but of a lively Faith, and a sincere Repentance. If we are not qualified by these two Dispositions; which indeed are inseparable Companions, neither the Mercy of God, nor the Efficacy of his Son's Death, nor any means whatsoever can save us from perishing, as they have not saved those unhappy Creatures, now in Torments, from falling head-long into endless Ruin.

These Truths are so positively express'd, and so frequently inculcated in the Holy Scripture, that if we acknowledge it for the Rule of Faith, we cannot entertain the least Doubt concerning them; for which reason, tho' Men seem to be in the humour of disputing every thing else, they are yet contented to leave this Point indisputable.

Wherefore, to assure our selves that we have already obtain'd the remission of our Sins, and are of the Number of God's Children, (which if we suspect we cannot be in possession of Conscience,) we must be secure that we have already believed and repented; as to assure our selves that we shall hereafter enjoy these Advantages, we must be secure that we shall believe and repent hereafter. But if without regard to such Faith and Repentance, without examining whether we do, or do not, possess them, we fondly conceive that we are  
out

out of all danger, and have nothing to fear, we voluntarily delude our selves, and the Error into which we run is so gross and notorious, as to admit of no colour or excuse.

### C H A P. XV.

*That e'er we can be in possession of Peace of Conscience, we must be of the Number of God's Children; and, farther, must be in a State of Grace.*

**T**HE bare knowledge, therefore, that God is infinitely Merciful, and that our Lord has expiated our Sins by shedding his own most precious Blood, is not sufficient to settle and compose our Conscience in lasting Peace: There is somewhat else which we must have necessarily added to this Knowledge. In the first place, we must have been truly Justified and Regenerated. We must have obtained the Remission of our Sins, and by our sincere Conversion, rendred our selves living Members of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ. *Gal. iv. 6. Because ye are Sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into Hearts, crying Abba, Father, says St. Paul.*

Let us suppose a Man to be still detain'd under the Slavery and Corruption of Sin, and not to have been yer rais'd to the glorious Dignity of a Child of God. One of these two things must infallibly happen; either he will know in how deplorable a State he is engaged, and if so, he must live under continual Terrors, and therefore his Conscience can by no means be said to be at Peace; or he will  
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imagin his State to be quite contrary to what it is, he will fancy himself to be truly converted and regenerate; whence, he will, consequently, deceive himself, and the Peace which he enjoys will prove a false Peace, grounded upon a Mistake, and therefore very different from the true Peace of God's Children, which is essentially just and solid.

Nor will the latter of my two Suppositions be denied; for it is indeed of the utmost evidence and certainty, every Day presenting us with a thousand Instances of the Case. True Regeneration is a thing very rarely to be found, and nothing is more common than to see Men who vainly fancy themselves to have received it, and by the bare strength of this Fancy possess some kind of Tranquillity and Repose.

The Writings and Sermons of Divines abound with just Complaints of this dangerous Error. We find them occasionally, speaking of such a Faith as not only implies some Conviction of the Truth, at least in part, but is also attended with some care of avoiding certain Sins, and of practising certain Duties. They farther expressly observe, that Persons endu'd with this Faith have some taste of Consolation and Joy; which they ground upon the Words of our Lord, when describing these Men in one of his Parables, he affirms that they *receive the Word with Joy*, tho' afterwards they desert it, on the score of Persecutions and other Inconveniences which arise. They must, therefore, be allowed to have some feeling of Joy, some taste of Consolation; but whence can this Joy or Consolation spring, but from their hope of escaping Hell,  
and



and attaining Heaven, and consequently from an Imagination with which they are possess'd, that they are precisely in such an Estate as is absolutely necessary to the acquiring of all these Advantages?

Our Saviour has declared in his Gospel, that many shall say unto him at the last Day, *Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name, and in thy Name have cast out Devils, and in thy Name done many marvellous Works?* But that he will profess unto them, *I never knew you, depart from me ye that work Iniquity.* Here we have Men who fancying in themselves Right and Title to the Glory of Heaven, miserably deceiv'd themselves; because, indeed, they were not truly converted and regenerate, nor had ever received forgiveness of their Sins. To believe, therefore, that we shall be saved, is by no means sufficient to secure our Salvation. But this Belief must be founded upon Truth, and we must be such in reality, as we are in our own Opinion.

Otherwise, I cannot apprehend, why St. Paul should so strictly enjoin us to examin and prove our selves, whether we are in the Faith and whether Jesus Christ is in us. If to be in the Faith implied no more than an assured Persuasion that we shall hereafter be so, it would be only needful to consider, whether we have such a Persuasion, in which Point the least Attention or Reflection would infallibly resolve us.

Were the Case thus, I see no reason why a dead Faith might not effectually save us, or why a true and lively Faith might not be separated from good Works; I see not in what Sense we could understand those Texts.

*Every*

*Every Tree which bringeth not forth good Fruit is hewn down and cast into the Fire: without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven.* All these undoubted Truths must be accused of notoriety, if to think our selves in a good State were really to be so.

Upon these Considerations I affirm, that the Conscience can never be in possession of a solid and lasting Peace, unless it be truly converted and regenerate; nor is this yet enough. We must persist and persevere in that happy Estate, to which by Conversion and Regeneration we have attain'd. Indeed, a Child of God who has fallen into some grievous Sin, and has not perform'd all things necessary to his rising again from it, is very far from enjoying the Felicity of a quiet Conscience. On the contrary, I am perswaded, that such a Person must feel more violent Commotions of Mind than unregenerate Sinners. It is certain, therefore, that e'er we can possess and enjoy this inward Peace of which we speak, we must not only be the Children of God, but we must likewise be in that blessed Condition, which by some is term'd a State of Grace; by others a present aptitude and capacity to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matt. iii.  
10.  
Heb. xii.  
14  
Matt. vii.  
21.

## C H A P. XVI.

*That in order to our possessing this Peace of Conscience, we must not only be the Children of God, and in a State of Grace, but we must likewise know our selves to be so, upon good and substantial Reasons.*

**T**HO' in order to our attaining true Peace of Conscience what has been now said is absolutely necessary, yet we must by no means imagin it to be sufficient; there are many Conditions yet behind. We must not only be of the number of God's Children, but we must know that we are so. For tho' we should really belong to that number, yet if we are ignorant, or so much as doubtful of it, we cannot pretend to the Peace of which we are discoursing.

And this Case is so far from being impossible, that 'tis what we very frequently meet with. There are good and pious Souls which being truly Regenerate, yet fearful and suspicious, are continually apprehensive of deceiving themselves in the Opinion of their own Sincerity, and are not, without the greatest pains and labour, brought to a rational assurance, and delivered from these vain Apprehensions. Nay, there are those who having commonly, and for the most part of their Life, enjoy'd a good degree of Peace and Comfort, find themselves at length surpriz'd with some violent Temptation, which dejects and oppresses them, and for some time interrupts the sweetness of their former Tranquillity. To this Estate was Holy *David* many times reduc'd, as appears from various Passages in his *Psalms*. Now



Now here, both the one and the other are truly God's Children, by Him acknowledg'd as such, and honour'd with his Love. Yet is not their Conscience in a perfect Calm, because they have not indeed a right understanding of their own Condition. So that e're we can be secure of Quiet and Repose, we must not only be the Children of God in reality, but we must be convinc'd that we are so, by a strong and vigorous Persuasion.

Nor is it enough that this Persuasion be strong and vigorous. It must farther, be wise and judicious, which it cannot be unless we ground it upon good and solid Reasons. For indeed if there be any one, (as no doubt there are many,) who being really a Child of God, believes himself so to be, without knowing why he believes it, not having applied due care to examin whether or no he is mistaken, his Belief tho' true at the bottom; yet is certainly rash and imprudent, and unworthy not only of a Child of God, but of a Wise and Considerate Man.

He, therefore, that pronounces himself to be of this Blessed Number, must understand the true cause of his passing so favourable a Judgment. He must have good and solid Arguments to support him, and such as take away all Doubt and Suspicion. And then he must know the Goodness and Solidity of these Arguments; it being impossible that the Certainty which he obtains should otherwise, be just and reasonable.

It will perhaps be said, that the necessity of Proofs and Reasons is superceded by the Testimony of the Holy Spirit. It will be said; that this Divine Instructor assures us of our  
E e 2 being

being God's Children, and that we ought therefore, with a lively Faith to receive his Assurance, without seeking to build our Confidence on any other Support or Stay.

But 'tis easie to reply, that we deceive our selves if we imagin, that the Holy Spirit testifies our Adoption to us formally and expressly, framing a kind of *still and low Voice* in our Hearts, such as shall wisper in so many Words, *You are of the Number of the Children of God.* We ought to leave these extravagant Conceits to the Quakers, and other Fanaticks. Such a Voice would indeed be an immediate Revelation, a direct Enthusiasm, and very different from the Methods of God's dealing with us, since the full Establishment of the Gospel.

If the Holy Spirit assures us of our Adoption, it is by other means. It is by having open'd to us those Lights of the Holy Scripture, by which we are to be guided in the discovery of this Truth. It is by having there distinctly mark'd out the Signs and Characters of true Adoption; It is by producing the like Characters in the Souls of the Faithful. It is by assisting and directing us, and preserving us from Error, when, by these Tokens and Characters, we try and examine our selves.

'Tis thus he teaches us to know what we truly are; not by Extasies, or Prophetick Transports, not by immediate Revelations, or by Voices form'd in our hearts. And consequently, if we desire to understand our real Estate, we must only be guided by these plain and sensible Characters which our Regeneration will always shew, if it be sincere.

We must seek for these Characters in our  
Thoughts

Thoughts, our Dispositions, and our Actions ; all which we may do, without any long train of reasoning, or any difficulty of Debate.

## C H A P. XVII.

*By what means we may understand our own Condition. Seven principal Characters of a State of Grace.*

**B**UT it will be ask'd, what then are these Marks and Characters of true Regeneration ? And what is the sure and easy way by which we may arrive at so necessary a Discovery ? I know no better than that which I have already intimated on several Occasions : I mean, the examining our selves whether we possess those three Dispositions, the most essential to the Children of God ; Repentance, Faith, and Charity ; by Charity understanding the Love of God, and of our Neighbour. For if we want, I do not say these three, but any one of these three, 'tis certain we can neither be the Object of Gods Love here on Earth, nor the Inheritors of his Glory in Heaven.

Now to discover whether we are in possession of these Virtues, we need only observe whether the Dispositions which we perceive in our selves, and which we take for Repentance, Faith, and Charity, have their true and genuine Marks, by which alone they are to be distinguish'd, and which I have set down in several places of this Treatise. This in my judgment is the shortest, and at the same time the safest way to obtain the knowledge of our Condition.



But because in explaining the use of this Method, and in applying it to our service, it would be necessary to repeat here what has been already deliver'd, which could not but be tedious and disagreeable to the Reader. I shall propose another Method, no less commodious and easie. It is the examining our selves by seven principal Characters, which most sensibly distinguish those who are the Children of God, from those who are not.

Mat. xi.  
28.

I. The first Character, is that which our Lord has given us in those known words of his Gospel : *Come unto me all ye that Labour and are heavy Laden, and I will give you Rest.* One of the Gifts and Blessings which we are here encourag'd to hope for, is undoubtedly peace of Conscience. This is most certainly a principal part of the *Rest* which our Saviour has promis'd. But to whom does he promise this *Rest* ? To those *who labour and are heavy laden.* That is, plainly, to those who have a lively sence of their Spiritual Evils, who comprehend the number, the heinousness, and the degree of their Sins : Who see, as it were, Hell open'd under their Feet, and whom this Prospect, with their just apprehension of God's Wrath, casts into a good and salutary disquietude.

Isa. lxi. 1.

These happy Grievs and Perplexities of Soul, must necessarily precede our Conversion : with regard to which, we hear our Blessed Saviour declaring by the Mouth of one of his Prophets, *The Lord has anointed me to bind up the broken hearted :* Nay, they ought, in some sense, to remain after our Conversion ; partly that the sorrow which we ought always to feel for our past Transgressions, and partly

partly by the strong Conviction which we ought to entertain of our being irrecoverably lost, should God proceed according to the Rigour of his Justice, and Reward us after our Doings. 'Tis in this respect that we are to understand those Words of God by the Prophet; *To this Man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a Contrite Spirit, and trembleth at my Word:* And in another place, *Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity, whose Name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy Place; with him also that is of an humble and contrite Spirit; to revive the Spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the Contrite one.* Isa. lxvi. 2, 15.

We ought therefore, to conclude, that neither Atheists, nor Epicureans, nor Deists, nor Profane, or Impious Persons, nor lastly, those who are possess'd with an extravagantly high Opinion of the Goodness and Sanctity of their own Works, can lay any just claim to this true and happy Peace which is now the subject of our Enquiry. They may be sunk in Security, they may be grown Stupid and Insensible, but they cannot enjoy a real Calm and Repose. This Advantage belongs to those alone, who reflect seriously on the greatness of their Offences, and on the Miseries which must inevitably attend them, should it not please God to hide and cover them with his infinite Mercy.

II. Our Blessed Lord has given us a second Indication, or Character in the same Text which discover'd to us the First. It is, in that he commands those who thus Labour and are heavy Laden to come to him, if they would be Refresh'd, or be at Rest. Hereby he lets

us understand that in order to our attainment of true Peace and Quiet of Conscience, it is not enough to be pierc'd with a deep sense of our Miseries, it is not enough to Mourn and Lament them; but we must farther seek the Remedy of them in the Bosom of infinite Mercy and Goodness; We must humbly and devoutly implore the Aids of that Divine Physician, by whom alone the Diseases of our Soul can be cured. Indeed, those who stop at the former Duty without proceeding to the latter, are so far from receiving Consolation, as to fall into utter Déjection and Despair. Such was the wretched Case of *Cain* and *Judas*, who were both sensible of the greatness of their Crimes, and of the Weight of God's heavy Displeasure, tho' neither of them address'd or intreated his Compassion and Forgiveness.

And since the Divine Mercy is only offer'd to us in and thro' our Lord, *Jesus Christ*,  
 Rom. iii. *whom God hath before Ordained to be a Propitia-*  
 25. *tion, thro' Faith in his Blood, there being none*  
 Acts iv. *other name under Heaven given among Men,*  
 12. *whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus;*  
 it is not sufficient to pray to God for his Grace, but we must pray for it in the Name of his Son. We must humbly present unto him our Saviour's most perfect Satisfaction, we must devoutly beg that he would Mercifully impute it to us, and would make us feel its saving Virtue and Power. This is the true Method of restoring Peace to our Consciences, agreeable to that of the Apostle, *Therefore being justified by Faith we have Peace with God thro' our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by Faith into this Grace wherein we*  
 Rom. v. *stand,*  
 1. 2.



*stand, and rejoyce in hope of the Glory of God.*

III. The two Notes or Characters, already described, are no doubt of great use ; yet we must acknowledge this Use to be still limited and confin'd. For even among those who cannot be said to enjoy the true Peace of God's Children, there are very few who are not convinc'd that without the Divine Pity and Pardon, they must irretrievably Perish. There are very few who do not feel some Grief and Remorse for their Sins ; very few who do not seek for Salvation in *Jesus Christ*, and with that his Satisfaction may be applyed and imputed to them. Yet still they are by no means the Children of God, and by consequence, cannot possess this Peace, which so Essentially and inseparably belongs to that Sacred Dignity. We must, therefore, of necessity have recourse to a third Character.

And this likewise our Blessed Saviour has taught us in his Gospel. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after Righteousness ; for they shall be filled.* By which words he instructs us that if we would obtain and possess the true Peace of his Children, we must not only put up Wishes and Prayers for the Remission of our Sins ; but we must with our most earnest Desire, study and labour after Justice and Holiness. We must enter into the strongest and most serious Inclinations of leading a more Christian and Regular Life for the future. We must oblige our selves to this, and set upon it with the fullest Purpose, and firmest Resolution. Thus we shall, after the true and proper manner, apply our selves to the Grace and Mercy of God, with Profit and Success. All other Methods are vain and unfruitful. There

Mat. v. 6.

There is a certain way of flying for Refuge to the Divine Mercy, and to the Merits of our Saviour, which stands us in no stead ; because indeed, 'tis not agreeable to the Nature of that Offer which is made us of Grace, by the Father, and of Satisfaction by the Son. This Grace, and this Satisfaction, are only tender'd to us, upon Condition that we seriously and sincerely abandon our Sins. But there are infinite Multitudes who take them in an absolute sense, and without engaging for any Terms on their own part. They beseech God, that he would admit them to Pardon, and would impute to them his Son's Merit : But they do not oblige themselves to be more Faithful and Diligent in his Service, than heretofore. They have no Design, no Intention to this effect ; So that their Faith is in vain, their Conversion imaginary, and by consequence, the Peace which attends it is by no means the Peace of God's Children.

Ps. cxxx.  
4.

Luke i.  
74. 75.

Tit. iii.  
11. 12.

*There is forgiveness with Thee*, says the Prophet, addressing himself to God : But to what end, is there Forgiveness ? Is it that we may persist in offending him, and continue to violate his Law ? No certainly. It is, that he *may be feared. He delivers us out of the hands of our Enemies, that we may serve him in Holiness and Righteousness all the days of our Life. The Grace of God that bringeth Salvation* ( and which according to St. Paul, hath appeared unto all Men, ) *teacheth us, that denying Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, we should live Soberly, Righteously and Godly, in this present World.*

So that to have truly made our Peace with God, and consequently to assure our selves upon solid grounds that we have made it,  
it



it is not enough to seek and implore his Mercy, and to lay hold on the Merits of his Son. We must oblige our selves to a quite different course of Life for the time to come. We must not only address and apply our selves to *Jesus Christ*, as our Priest, and our Prophet, so as to accept his Merit, and to believe what he reveals. But we must likewise receive and acknowledge him as our King, and strictly practice what he Commands.

But this is not all. Many there are who entertain such a Design, who form such a Resolution, who bind themselves with these Promises and Engagements, and yet fail at length in executing and performing. Upon the first occasion they fall back again into their old Sins, and let slip all the opportunities of bringing forth Good Works, offer'd to them by the Mercy of God. Such were those of whom the Prophet speaks; *O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah what shall I do unto thee! for your Goodness is as a Morning Cloud, and as the early Dew it goeth away.* This immature Goodness appears somewhat bright and agreeable, but then it has no manner of strength or solidity; the slightest Temptation defeats and dissipates it: Nor is it so nearly resembled by any thing as by those drops of Dew, which in the Morning may be taken for so many melted Pearls, or dissolv'd Diamonds, but which vanish and disappear before the Rising Sun.

Hof. vi. 4.

Our Lord in one of the Parables of his Gospel, represents to us the False Conversions under the similitude of Seed, fallen among Thorns, and upon stony Places; which at first sprang up and put forth, but being  
choak'd



choak'd by the Thorns on the one side, and scorch'd and wither'd by the Sun on the other, it brought no Fruit to perfection. On the contrary he represents the nature of true Conversion, by the Seed sown in good Ground, and bringing forth Fruit abundantly.

Prov.  
xxviii.

Upon the same foundation the Wise King declares, that *whoso confesseth and forsaketh his Sins shall have Mercy*. He does not only require that we should confess, or even hate and detest our Sins ; He obliges us absolutely to forsake them : And he gives us no promise of Mercy, but upon our compliance with these Terms.

James ii.  
26,

Lastly, it is for no other Reason that St. James gives us for the Mark and Characteristick of true Faith, not Designs, or Resolutions, but real Works : *Faith*, (says he) *without Works is dead*.

1 Joh. ii.  
34, 5.

We have here, then, one of the most essential Differences of the Children of God, and one of the most infallible ways to obtain a certain knowledge whether we our selves are of the Number. And that is, to observe and consider, whether we pay an exact Obedience to God's Commandments. This is almost the only Rule, which St. John proposes in his General Epistle. *Hereby* (says he) *we do know that we know him, if we keep his Commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his Commandments is a Liar, and the truth is not in him : But whoso keepeth his Word, in him verily is the Love of God perfected. And in the very next Chapter : Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not ; whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little Children let no man deceive you : He that doeth Righteousness is Righteous,*  
even

*even as he is Righteous. He that committeth Sin is of the Devil, for the Devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the Works of the Devil. Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit Sin; for his Seed remaineth in him; and he cannot Sin, because he is born of God. In this the Children of God are manifested, and the Children of the Devil: Whosoever doth not Righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his Brother.* 1 Joh. iii. 6. 7, 8. 9. 10.

V. Yet there is somewhat still behind. We meet with those who, in some sort, come up to the Character last describ'd. They enter upon a Resolution of Amendment: They partly perform their Resolution, they abandon most of their old Sins; and correct, outwardly at least, a considerable number of Defaults; But they shall leave one, or two in reserve, to which their Constitution, their Education, or some other the like Principle inclines them more strongly, and invincibly than to all besides, and from which they have not the Power to abstain. This they repeat till it turns into a habit, and this habit at length becomes a second Nature, and kind of Necessity.

We need no other proof to shew that such Men are not in the way to Heaven. For as I have evinc'd at large in another Treatise, any one Habitual Sin is an Argument of these two things: First, that the Conversion which has not rooted out this Habit, is vain and unprofitable, and such as can by no means render us the Children of God: Secondly, that whether this Habit preceded our Conversion, or whether it was form'd since, it is

at least a manifest indication, that during the time while it continues and subsists, the Party cannot be in a State of Grace, and consequently, cannot enjoy true Peace of Conscience.

VI. These five Chapters might perhaps, be sufficient; and indeed whoever is well assur'd that he possesses these, may likewise be assur'd, that he is truly a Child of God, and in a State of Grace. Yet since most of them are of a very wide extent, and may seem too general, and since the World abounds with strange Illusions in this respect, it may not be amiss to add two others, which are expressly set down in Holy Scripture.

Luke xiv. 26. The first is that which our Lord has given us in his Holy Gospel : *If any Man come to me and hate not his Father, and Mother, and Wife, and Children, and Brethren, and Sisters, yea, and his own Life also, he cannot be my Disciple.* All agree that by hatred in this place, we are only to understand a less degree of Love. So that what our Saviour, in these words requires of us, is, that we should love him Sovereignly, and above all things; that is to say, that no Temporal Consideration, of what Order or what Nature soever, should prevail with us to Offend, and Displease him, by any one known and deliberate Sin; as I have more fully explain'd this Text, in the Second Volume of my *Moral Essays*.

C. iii. v. 14. 15. VII. The second additional Mark, or Character, is that St. John lays down in his General Epistle : *We know that we have passed from Death unto Life, because we love the Brethren : he that loveth not his Brother abideth in Death: Whosoever hateth his Brother is a Murderer ;*



*derer ; and ye know that no Murderer has Eternal Life abiding in him. This is too clear and obvious to need any Explication.*

## C H A P. XVIII.

*The Character set down in the last Chapter applied to Sinners.*

**T**Hese are the principal Characters which the Scripture affords us, as the means of discovering our true Estate. I am now only to apply them to use. They shew, therefore, who are the Children of God, and who are not, but with a considerable difference in the manner. The latter they point out to us with more facility and more certainty than the former. The Reason is because a full Conviction of any one of them is enough to certify a Man that he is not a Child of God : Whereas to be well assur'd that he is so, he ought to know and feel that he possesses them all.

Let us suppose a Man to have a lively sense of his own Miseries, but not to implore the Mercy of God for their relief ; or while he implores it, not to have recourse to *Jesus Christ*, and his Merit. Or let us suppose, that tho' he applies to God through his Beloved Son, yet he does not so much as pretend to tie or oblige himself to any performance ; or, that, having engag'd to amend his Life, he does not execute his Promise : Let us suppose, that while he executes it in part, he yet continues enslav'd to some habitual Sin. Again, let us suppose, that while he either gives no attention to any one of these Marks, or flatters himself as to the greatest part of them ;

them; he certainly knows all this while; that there is something which he prefers to God, and by consequence, that he does not love him Sovereignly, or above all things. Let us suppose, in the last place, that while he is wholly regardless even of this, he yet fully apprehends himself to be out of Charity with any one of his Neighbours. Each of these Marks, alone, is sufficient to convince him that he is not in the way to Heaven, but that, without Repentance and Amendment, he is lost beyond Recovery.

Since, then, it is incomparably more easie to examin our selves by some one Test or Character, then by many; it must be far more difficult for the Children of God to know their own Happiness, than for Sinners to know their own Misery. Because as I observ'd, the want of any one Token may certify the latter of their State; whereas the former cannot be assur'd of theirs, till they have gone thro' the whole course, and tried themselves upon each particular.

This may be confirm'd by another Consideration. It is, that the Marks of a sinful State are much more sensible, and as I may say, deeper than those of a State of Grace: For instance, what can be more sensible, at least commonly speaking, than an habitual Sin? Can he who relapses into the same sin as often as he finds Occasion, make any doubt but that his Sin is advanced into a Habit? But 'tis quite otherwise in respect of the opposite Character. Those who are really exempt from all Habitual Sin, cannot yet assure themselves that they are so, till after much enquiry and reflection: As will ardently appear from these two Remarks.

First,

First, that this Character implies an exemption, not from one, or two Sins, but absolutely from all. So that no Man can be sure that he has this Character in himself, unless he exactly Computes and Surveys in his Mind, all the Sins of this order, and examines himself as to each in particular: which is a far more laborious task, than to join issue upon one only, which may probably offer it self and prevent the least Enquiry. Especially, since in the Number of Habitual Sins, there are some which cannot be discover'd, but by long and serious Observation: Such as Pride, Envy, Malice, Detraction, and the like.

Secondly, that as to any one particular Sin, it is commonly more evident that a Man is engag'd in it, when he really is so; than that a Man is exempt from it, when he really possesses such an Exemption. He that is habitually engag'd in a Sin, often relapses into it. What more plain and sensible token than this? He that is exempt from a Sinful Habit, may yet sometimes fall into the Act. Who can deny but that this must create some difficulty and trouble in making a proper judgment.

I may affirm the same of the Sixth Character. A Man who stands always ready and prepar'd for the Commission of certain Sins, may hence very easily apprehend, that he prefers either the Motive, or the Matter, of these Sins to God himself, and by consequence, that he is not in a State of Grace. But ere we can obtain an assurance of our preferring God to all things, as we must of necessity do; if we would be sure that we are in the way to Heaven, we ought to have a distinct



knowledge of all our particular Inclinations and Properties towards the Creatures, and to compare them one by one, with our desire of Serving and Pleasing God : which requires some Application, and some Accuracy.

Nay, we are much more assur'd that we prefer something else to God, in the Commission of a Sin, than that we prefer God to something else, in the performance of a good Work. The former Case admits of no doubt : but the latter may chance to be perplex'd ; because Self-love does sometimes so artificially disguise and conceal it self, as to bear the principal part in an Action without once appearing in it.

Thus we find that the Characters, before set down are of such a Nature, that most Men who flatter themselves with a false Peace, may by the least glance or reflection upon them, evidently discern themselves to be under a Mistake.

How many daily Examples do we see, of those who are deeply engag'd and enslav'd in Criminal Habits, who very frequently relapse into the same Faults ; who never think of Amendment, or never think of it vigorously and in good earnest ? How many are there who unjustly detain their Neighbour's Goods, who are conscious of their detaining them, who have it in their power to restore them, and yet entertain not the least design of actual Restitution ? How many, who have ruin'd their Brother's Credit and Reputation by Calumnies, who cannot be ignorant of what they have done, and yet who never propose to repair the Injury, or to confess the Error of their Detraction ? How many, who having  
conceiv'd

conceiv'd a mortal hatred against their Brethren, persist voluntarily in it, and let whole Years pass over their Heads, without endeavouring to suppress their Resentments? How many, who being engag'd in impure Familiarity; cannot and will not break them off, by changing their course of Life?

The Fifth Character, of those but now recited, without having recourse to any of the rest, is enough to convince us very plainly, that all these numerous Sinners are most grossly mistaken, when they fancy themselves to be in a State of Grace. We need no other Proof, that the Peace which they seem to enjoy is but a profane Security, and nothing like the Calm and the Comfort of God's Children,

The Sixth is enough to disabuse and undeceive a multitude of Sinful Men, whose Lusts and Passions, and Worldly Interests and Engagements are much stronger than any desire which they have to serve and please God. For example, those who are ever ready to revenge themselves when affronted; or to meet upon a Duel, when challeng'd; for such Persons prefer their Airy Phantom of false Honour; in their Affection, to the Commands of God; and therefore cannot love him Sovereignly, or, above all things, as they must of necessity do, if they would love him as his Children.

Those who are resolv'd and determin'd to disown the Truth, when they cannot confess it without exposing themselves to the danger of losing their Life, their Estate, their Ease and Quiet, and the like Advantages: all those who to gain any Profit, or to decline any Damage; who to advance them-

felvcs higher, or to keep themselves from sinking lower, are dispos'd to commit known and deliberate Sins : All these Men may by this Mark alone discover themselves to be utterly mistaken in laying any claim to a State of Grace.

I might proceed to shew the same, in the other Characters Assign'd. But because they are obvious to every one's sight, I shall content my self with concluding from the whole, that there are very few Sinners to whom one or other of these Characters might not afford the means of knowing their present Estate, almost without any Examination, and by a bare inspection into their own Sentiments and Conduct.

Yet I acknowledge that this cannot be said universally and without exception. I confess there are some Sinners who have need of a little more Study and Observation, in order to their knowing themselves. Such are those whose outward behaviour is more fair and regular ; particularly those, who, according to the Scripture expression, *believe for a time*, and in whom the Word preached, with the concurring Influence of the Holy Spirit, produces such Effects as seem to resemble those which are by the same Word produced in the Minds of the truly good and Pious,

Now, such Persons cannot see the bottom of their own heart, without more exact and more laborious Reflections. Yet, if they would give themselves the trouble of such Reflections, it would not be difficult for them to succeed in the Design : Indeed 'tis very certain that they are deficient in most of the Characters which I have set down ; the fifth  
and



and the sixth especially. I am persuaded, that there is not one among all the Sinners of this Tribe, who does not lye under the slavery of some habitual Sin. But this I take to be indisputably true, that there is not one of them who does not prefer some other Object to Almighty God, and who has not more strong and violent propensions than can be equall'd by his desire of pleasing the Supream Being, and of performing his Commands. Indeed, the bent of our corrupted Nature carries us with our whole weight towards the Creature; and nothing but Sanctifying and Regenerating Grace can turn us back again towards the Creator.

It were to be wish'd, therefore, that the Persons of whom we are now speaking would examine themselves upon this foot. They could not certainly be long in discovering their true Condition. Especially, since the Reasons which they have to pass so favourable a judgment on themselves, are very slight and superficial, or rather are visibly false, and incapable of blinding any, but those who study to deceive themselves.

Their Reasons are generally, such as follow. They are exact in the outward Functions and Offices of Religion: They have some kind of Love and Esteem for the Speculative Doctrines which this Religion teaches. They defend them with Heat and Vehemence: They are content to sustain some Loss and Damage, rather than they will be obliged to quit the Profession of them; they have some remorse for their past Sins. They implore the Divine Mercy and Pardon. They hope to obtain it, thro' the Merit of *Jesus Christ*. Lastly,

they abstain from many open and scandalous Vices into which they see others fall on very frequent occasions. Hence they conclude themselves to be truly of the Number of God's Children, and doubt not but that, dying in this State, they shall infallibly be saved.

But neither any one of these Principles in particular nor all of them in general, can afford sufficient grounds for such an Inference; they are almost all of them to be found in false Religions. How many *Jews*, *Mahometans*, and *Pagans* are there, who perform very strictly what their Law prescribes? How many are there of them, who appear zealous in the defence of their absurd Opinions? How many, who will rather dye than renounce or abjure them? How many, who abstain from a great number of Sins, and who are no more *Extortioners*, *Unjust*, or *Adulterers*, than the *Pharisee* in the Parable? How many, whose outward behaviour is full as honest, or at least full as regular as that of true Christians?

And then, as for the other particulars, do those alone who are true Christians, or the Children of God, mourn and lament the Sins of which their Consciences accuse them? Do they alone beg pardon of God, and wish to be allow'd a share in the Imputation of our Saviour's Merits? No certainly, all these Marks are equivocal, and agree almost equally to those who are the Children of God, and to those who neither are, nor perhaps ever will be such. And therefore, since the Persons of whom we are now speaking have no other reason or foundation to believe themselves of this Number, their belief can be no other than vain and groundless.

## C H A P. XIX.

*The same Characters applied to those who are truly the Children of God.*

Enough has been said of these Characters, with regard to the Case of such as want them. It remains that we consider what use and benefit it may afford to such as have them. And here, that we may be more distinct, it seems necessary to make two Classes or Orders of the latter. The first Class contains those in whom all the recited Characters manifestly and sensibly appear. Such are they who have made the greatest progress in Piety, and whose sanctification is not only true in its nature, but forward and well advanc'd in its growth. The Second consists of those in whom the same Characters are more obscure, and more difficult to be discover'd: Such are they whose Regeneration is as yet weak and imperfect.

This is the utmost difference that I can apprehend between these two Orders of Good Men, or of God's Children. For indeed, we must not imagine that any Man can aspire to to such a Dignity, in whom any one of the said Characters is absolutely wanting; all are indispensably necessary, and (as I have observ'd upon another Occasion,) the absence of any one of the number, would be a convincing proof that we are not in the right way to Eternal Happiness. Nay, we might hence conclude, that we wanted even those others which we fancied our selves to have: For the greatest part of them are, indeed, so streightly allyed and united to each other,



that 'tis impossible they should be separately possess'd ; the Proof of which would be easy, were it not here unnecessary. The Sum therefore, of what I can affirm in this matter, is, that these Characters may be more or less sensible, according as we are more or less advanc'd in Goodness.

They who having made a considerable Proficiency, can plainly and evidently discern all these Characters in the present state of their Soul, have no manner of reason to be doubtful, or suspicious, as indeed they are not. They enjoy the sweeter Calm, and such as is never, or very rarely interrupted.

As for those of the other Order, if they don't perceive the Marks of their own Adoption, 'tis certainly, because they don't consider them with due Care and Attention, and because they don't reason truly and justly about them. So that what they ought to do on these occasions, is, to redouble their pains and diligence, to be still making new acquisitions, and to omit nothing that might assist them in the discovery of so important a Truth.

I add, that they ought not to give the least Ear to a number of false Reasons, which are the ordinary springs of Doubts and Suspicion in Good Men. These Reasons are all taken from the Weaknesses and Defects which we feel in our selves, and which indeed are so far to be look'd upon as grievous and unhappy, as that they ought to incline us to Godly Sorrow, but not to deject us, or to make us doubt of our Adopted State. They are really no more than the natural consequences of our unfinish'd Regeneration. Which Work, how  
great

great and excellent soever, is never brought to its last perfection in this present Life: The best of Men, and most advanc'd in Holiness are not without their Failings and Infirmities; much less are those, who have but lately enter'd on the Ways of true Religion, or having made their Entrance long since, have not gone so far in the Course as might have been wish'd.

The greatest and most considerable of these Defects, are, no doubt, our Sins: and yet from these no man (we know) can plead Exemption. *There is no Man that sinneth not*; 1 Kings viii. 46. says Solomon. *In many things we offend all*: says St. James. That Source of Corruption and Impurity, which we bring with us into the World, is never wholly destroy'd, or exhausted, but by Death: Till then we may strive against it, we may weaken and abate it, but we cannot absolutely free our selves from its power. What St. Paul has observ'd will for ever hold good: *The Flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the Flesh; and these are contrary, so that* (as he adds) *ye cannot do the things that ye would.* Gal. v. 17.

And yet from these Imperfections are drawn those Arguments which most strongly incline us to doubt of our Regeneration; at least, when our doubts are unjust and contrary to the Truth; for of such alone we are now discoursing. This will appear more evident, if we take a particular view of the said Arguments: the most considerable of which, I shall set down in the following Chapter. Indeed, I propose not to give an account of them all. For if so, I must have so Comprehensive a knowledge of them, as that not one should

should escape my acquaintance : Which perhaps no Man can pretend to ; and besides they are so very numerous, that I could not examine them all without engaging my self in an excessive length. I shall therefore confine my Enquiry to those which are more common than others, at least which seem to me to be so, and which I have heard most frequently alledg'd in my conversation on this Subject with Persons truly serious, and careful of their Souls. I except those which I touch'd upon in the Seventh Chapter of this last Book, having nothing to add to what I there observ'd concerning them.

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#### C H A P. XX.

*The principal Reasons enquir'd into, upon which Good Men sometimes doubt the truth of their Regeneration.*

I. **T**H E most ordinary Reason which inclines Men to fear in this respect, may perhaps, be the mistaken nature of this Fear it self. Many are wont to form a very wrong Idea of this Passion, and to consider it directly opposite to Faith : They confound the jealousy and apprehension which they have of their not being truly Converted and Regenerated ; or, their not possessing a lively Faith, and a sincere Repentance, with that Fear and Diffidence, or Distrust, which is so criminal in its Nature, and so injurious to the Goodness and Mercy of God. Now the latter being very inconsistent with true Faith, they imagine the former, which they feel in themselves,



themselves, to have the same repugnancy. And not being able to shake of this, nor to avoid the sense of it, hence very rashly conclude themselves to be out of the Number of true Believers.

They put another fallacy upon themselves, which is much of the same kind ; they confound the direct Act of Faith, by which we rely on *Jesus Christ*, as our Saviour and Redeemer, with the *reflex* Act of the same Faith, which is nothing else but the judgment, or persuasion that we have, as to the sincerity of the *direct*. They conceive this *reflex* Act to be that which properly justifies us ; whereas indeed it only cheers and comforts us ; the former, or the *direct* Act, being the only Instrument in the great Work of our Justification before God. Not being exactly acquainted with this distinction, they imagine that the Fear which they are in as to the truth of their Regeneration and the sincerity of their Faith, which can only weaken their *reflex* Act, absolutely destroys their whole Belief, and so deprives them of the inestimable Benefit of Justification, which includes the actual remission of Sins.

Now these being such Errors as have been thoroughly and solidly confuted by Divines, we ought to despise all apprehensions that have no better Foundation. We ought to assure our selves that this kind of Fear is no way incompatible with a Regenerate State. Nay, I am persuaded, that those by whom it is entertain'd, are much more advanc'd in the way to Heaven, than the greatest part of those who continually boast of their being fearless.

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The Proceeding of this latter seems to me a very evil Sign. It discovers a large stock of Pride ; or, however, a great defect of Modesty and Humility. It likewise argues a very mean and scanty Notion of the Purity enjoin'd by the Gospel. Whereas the contrary disposition shews Men to have a principle of Sincerity at the bottom, to be heartily concern'd for the Great Affair of their Salvation, and not wholly ignorant of the means of succeeding in it. So that the cause of passing a disadvantageous judgment on our selves, is utterly false and groundless, and we are much in the wrong if we suffer it to give us any great disturbance.

II. I may say the same, as to the fear of Death. I have met with very many who suspected the sincerity of their own Faith, only because the thought of Death was apt to make them tremble : But before we draw any such Inference, we ought to well consider what is the Source and Origine of this Fear ; if it arise from the Affection to those Worldly Goods which Death must deprive us of, it is highly Criminal, and in all respects unworthy of a Child of God. If the ground and object of it are those Pains, Convulsions, and Disquietudes, which we conceive to be the inseparable attendants of Death, it is no less culpable than in the former Case. But then, if it proceed from our apprehension of that Divine Judgment which must follow the separation of the Soul from the Body ; we ought to enter into a new Enquiry, and consider for what reasons we fear the issue of this Judgment. If 'tis because we are persuaded that the Mercy of God does not extend to the  
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Pardon of our Sins, how lively and sincere soever our Faith and Repentance approve themselves, our Fear is still sinful in a high degree, and is properly the Fear of Incredulity and Distrust. On the contrary, if we are therefore only fearful because we do not think our Faith and Repentance sufficiently lively and sincere; this kind of Fear is co-incident with that which was describ'd in the preceding Article, and therefore, such as ought not to daunt or discourage us.

III. There are few Men, not excepting the most advanc'd in Piety, who from time to time, do not feel certain thoughts rising in their Mind, which if absolutely consider'd are highly sinful, but which are so far from delighting them, as to surprize them with the greatest Horror, and to put them upon the immediate care of stifling such Monsters in their Birth. Many Divines are of opinion, that these are meant by *the fiery Darts of the Devil*, which St. Paul speaks of, and which he says ought to be *quench'd* with *the Shield of Faith*. Others take them to be the natural consequences of the Union between the Soul and Body, and the necessary effects of certain Motions either of the whole Machine, or some peculiar part; but whatever they are as to their Natural Causes, yet being involuntary and undeliberate, they have no manner of inconsistency with true Regeneration: and by consequence, those timorous Consciences which fright themselves with them, have no reason to do so, provided they are careful to withhold their consent from them, on the contrary utterly detesting them, and using all diligence for their immediate suppression; which



which we ought certainly to endeavour with our utmost Ability ; for if we give them the least time to fix upon our Soul, they become voluntary, and by consequence sinful.

IV. The Case of Distraction in Prayer admits of the same solution. There's scarce any thing which creates more pain and trouble to Good Men, they find it unconceivably difficult to avoid all Failings of this kind. Indeed our Mind is naturally so light and volatile, and at the same time has so great a dependance on the Body, that after our utmost labour and endeavour, 'tis almost impossible to compose it in a settled frame : The consideration of which, ought certainly to fill us with Holy Sorrow, and to make us afflict and humble our Souls before God. But then, we must also strive to correct this great infirmity, and to lessen it gradually, if we cannot wholly subdue it : However it ought not to cast us into Despondency, or to make us question the reality of our own Adoption ; because 'tis a failing from which the best and holiest of Men have not been entirely exempt, there being few of the Number, who have not complain'd of this Subject, and declar'd that after all their Diligence and Caution they were never able to attain a perfect Liberty.

V. We are likewise wont on several occasions, to find in our selves certain indispositions to the Offices of Piety, which make us come to them with reluctance and regret. This gives us a great deal of trouble and uneasiness, and 'tis reasonable it should : Nothing is more contrary to the most essential Character of the Love of God, which if once establish'd

establiſh'd in the full poſſeſſion of our Hearts, renders this Great Object of our Care in its utmoſt extent, agreeable and delightful to us. Nay I confeſs, if theſe Diſguſts continue for any ſeaſon, ſo as to degenerate into a conſtant and perpetual Averſion, this would be a very bad indication, and too juſt a reaſon to pronounce diſadvantageouſly of our ſelves. But the caſe is otherwiſe, when this happens but rarely, and at ſome particular times; eſpecially, if we condemn our ſelves for it, if we lament our own Unhappineſs, and contribute all that we can towards its Cure: We may then be allow'd to grieve and afflict our ſelves; but not to be terrified above meaſure, to give up our Hopes, or to lay aſide our Courage. There are very few Good Men who have not experienced the like Miſfortunes.

VI. Many, again, are induc'd to fear, by reaſon of their ſlow advance in Goodneſs: It is, nodoubt, eſſential to the true Children of God, to make a daily progreſs in this Heavenly Courſe, and continually to gain new Advantages over their own Imperfections. It muſt therefore be a very dangerous Symptom to go backward in this great Work, or even not to go forward. But as I have obſerv'd in a diſtinct Treatiſe, there are two Precautions which ought here to be applied.

The firſt is, that e're we proceed to argue about any Fault which we accuſe our ſelves of, we ought to be well aſſur'd that we are guilty; as in the preſent Caſe, we ought to be very ſure that we do not advance in Piety. For indeed, 'tis poſſible we may gain ground, at the ſame time when we fancy our ſelves to be  
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be losing it; the difference between our present and our past Estate arising only from hence, that we are better acquainted with our selves now than we were before.

Secondly, it ought to be observ'd, that when we say, a Good Man is always advancing, we speak with regard to his whole Life, taken in one view, not to each particular Stage and Period of it: We mean, that at the hour of Death he is gone much farther in the ways of Religion, than in the next minute after his Conversion: 'Tis true he may sometimes go back, but then he afterwards recovers what he has lost, and acquires more than he posselt. If these two considerations were but duly weigh'd, this occasion of Fear would not be found altogether so solid, as at first it appears.

VII. Again, Men are dispos'd to be fearful and apprehensive, when they come to reflect on the great disproportion between what they do in order to their Salvation, and what they should, and might have done. They see plainly that the former comes far short of the latter; and hence they infer, that they are certainly out of the way to Heaven: But this is no just consequence; for were it so, it would be applicable to all Men without exception. Let us take the Holiest and most Perfect among men, or to speak more properly, those who approach the nearest to Perfection, and Holiness. Let us examin the sum of all that they perform to please God, and to save their own Souls; we shall find that 'tis nothing in comparison with what they were able, and were oblig'd to do; nothing answerable to those great and indispenfible Engage-



Engagements which arise from the Mercies and Compassions of God to Men ; from our Saviour's Death, and his precious Blood-shedding for our Deliverance ; and from the consideration of that Happy or Miserable Eternity which awaits us. This Reflection, therefore should excite and quicken us to Duty, but it ought not to be abus'd into an occasion of discouragement and dejection.

VIII. We likewise find just cause to fear, on account of our Propensions to Worldly Goods, or in general, to the Creatures : These propensions being in a manner the only Source of all Sins, and the chief occasion of Mens final miscarriage, it is very difficult to feel and apprehend them, without the greatest Terror. But then, it imports us to consider, that Death alone can break off these Desires, and that Grace does no more than weaken them, and bring them into subjection to the Love of God. We must not therefore stop at the Conviction which we may possibly be under, of our not being absolutely deliver'd from them : But we must make a just comparison of them with our Love of God, and our desire of serving and pleasing him. We must see whether they are stronger or weaker than this Love ; if they are stronger, we have reason to conclude our selves in a dangerous Condition ; but if they are weaker, and if we find our selves so far able to conquer them, as not to offend God by known and deliberate Sins, we may be assur'd that we are in a common state of good and Pious men.

IX. Lastly, we are, the best of us apt to tremble, when we reflect our past Behaviour. We find our selves at present dispos'd to part

with all, rather than offend God. But we thought our selves heretofore, under the same good disposition : And yet the event prov'd us to be mistaken, and when Temptations assaulted us with any violence, we yielded to them. We conclude that the same misfortune may happen hereafter, and consequently, that this inward Testimony of our Mind may be false ; which cannot but discompose and interrupt our Tranquility.

Of all the Considerations which enduce Good Men to suspect the sincerity of their own Conversion, this is certainly the most pressing ; and yet 'tis as certain that we ought not to allow it too much weight : For we may happen to have been mistaken in the first judgment which we made of our selves, and yet not in the second. The resolution which we now take to renounce all things rather than displease God, may possibly be stronger than that which we took formerly ; and besides, there's a great deal of difference between a sincere Resolution, and an effectual one : An effectual Resolution is very often successful ; but not always ; Witness that of *St. Peter*. The first, according to *St. Austin*, is the mark of Divine Love in its rise and beginning ; the second, in its Accomplishment and height : So that this Reason which appears so formidable, has indeed no solidity, and by consequence, ought not to defeat and evacuate our Christian Hopes.

Yet we cannot deny but that it must considerably impair them. And therefore we must necessarily have recourse to other Helps and Remedies : We must labour to render this good Resolution which we have taken up,  
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of abandoning all rather than consent to Sin, as strong and effectual, as may be. The particular ways and methods I shall not here set down; having given an account of them in the Second Volume of my *Essays*, and especially in my *Abridgment of Christian Morals*.

## C H A P. XXI.

*Two Objections against the former Discourse. The first Objection answer'd. The Method here proposed is not too long.*

FROM the sum of what has been offer'd it appears, that in order to the true discovery of our present State, we ought not to pay any great deference to the Common Reasons which we have either to hope or fear. We ought to be wholly guided by the Characters which I have describ'd, and which in my opinion, supply the most solid Arguments, and the most sure foundations for a wise and rational Judgment.

Yet I am persuaded, that the method which I propose will not be satisfactory to all my Readers. Many will be inclin'd to ensure it, as long, painful, and laborious, and therefore inconvenient. It requires too much time, too much Care, too much Search and Enquiry, to be agreeable to those who cannot bear the least trouble or fatigue, who would have every thing that they undertake to be easy; such as may be done in a Moment, and without any stress of Application.

Others soon perceiving this Method will serve only to convince them that they are not in the way to Heaven, and consequently, to



rob them of false Peace which they desire for ever to enjoy ; will maintain that 'tis fit for nothing but to fill the Mind with Scruples, and to throw Good Men into excessive Frights and Terrours, if not into Despair.

But let the former give themselves the trouble to consider a little whether there be any reason in what they object. The way which I propose, is I confess, laborious and painful ; tho' perhaps not to such a degree as they imagine. But then in the first place, it is sure, which no other is : If they can shew me another way which is more easie, and at the same time more certain, I am ready to desert my own. But if there is no other thus preferable to it, as I am persuaded there is not, must we not then of necessity either follow this which I have pointed out, or remain under perpetual ignorance and uncertainty, as to our real Estate ?

They will say, perhaps there is another method incomparably shorter, and not less sure than that which I advise. They will say 'tis enough barely to examine whether we have Faith ; because Faith, as the Scripture teaches, infallibly puts us into a State of Grace, and in the most certain manner, confirms our Peace and Reconciliation with God. They will add that nothing is more easie than to discover whether we have Faith or not ; because all the Acts and all the Motions of the Soul are apprehended in the same instant in which they are produc'd, and because St. *Austin* has particularly affirm'd that a Man can have no more certain knowledge of any thing than of his own Faith.

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But 'tis obvious to discern, that the Method is neither shorter than that which I propos'd, nor indeed any way different from it. For, in the first place it's certain there is a two-fold Faith : There is one which St. *James* pronounces *dead*, and declares to be unprofitable ; there's another, which being directly opposite to this, may be styl'd lively and salutary. The latter is that which St. *Paul* terms *the Faith of God's Elect*.

Tit. i. 1.

'Tis easie indeed, to know whether we do believe, or do not. The slightest reflection will satisfy us in this point : and St. *Austin* meant no more, when he affirm'd that a Man could have no more certain knowledge of any thing than of his own Faith. But 'tis somewhat more difficult to know of what Order or Character our Faith is ; 'tis more difficult to pronounce whether it be lively, or dead.

And yet such a discernment is absolutely necessary. For 'tis certain and indisputable, that a dead Faith, can neither put us into a State of Grace here, nor hinder us from perishing Eternally hereafter : *What doth it profit my Brethren, saith St. James, tho' a Man say he hath Faith, and have not Works? can Faith save him?*

Jam ii. 14.

So that if we would put this method in practice, we must not stop at the bare Opinion or Persuasion which we have of our Faith. We ought to try and examine its Nature. We ought to see whether it be Lively or Dead, Profitable or Unprofitable ; which I think is not profitable to be done in such a manner as shall exclude all doubt, otherwise than by searching whether the Faith which we per-

ceive in our selves has those Characters that distinguish a lively and saving Faith, from a Dead Faith, and such as cannot profit.

But what are these Characters? All our Divines assert, that true Faith is ever preceded by a lively and exquisite sense of our own Misery, and consequently, by a violent Grief and Trouble, which inclines us humbly to betake our selves to the mercy of God, and to the Merits of *Jesus Christ*. Again, *St. Paul* Gal. v. 6. observes, that it *worketh by Love*. *St. John*, 1 Joh. ii. 3. 'tis attended with the keeping of *God's Commandment*: and *St. James* tells us, in the same sense, that *Faith without Works is dead*. C. ii. v. 20. 26.

We must therefore, examine our Faith by these Characters, if we would be rightly appriz'd of its Truth. But if we once enter upon such an Examination, where's the difference between this Method, and the first of those two which I before advanced? Mine was, that we should gain an assurance whether we were really possess'd of Faith, Repentance, and Charity. And this which is prefer'd to it in some Mens judgments, visibly imports the very same thing. It consists first, in being assur'd whether we have Faith, or not. Secondly, in observing whether we are touch'd with a lively sense of our own Misery, whether we have recourse to the Divine Mercy, and to our Saviour's Merits, and at the same time, whether we heartily and sincerely renounce all Sin, taking up a strong Resolution to serve God, and perform his Commands; which constitutes the very Essence and Perfection of Repentance. Lastly, in searching whether or no we are endued with a principle of Charity.

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Upon the whole we see this Method is in no respect different from the first of those two which I propos'd, and which, at the bottom is the same with the Second ; at least there is no material distinction between them : So that whether we are determin'd by Faith alone, as the sole Character of a State of Grace, or whether we joyn to it Repentance, and Charity ; or, whether without insisting upon these three Graces, we are guided by the seven Characters which I have describ'd in my XVII Chapter ; the Labour is always equal, or to speak more properly, is always the same.

## C H A P. XXII.

*The second Objection answer'd. That the Method does not tend to interrupt the Peace of Good Men, or to cast them in despair.*

**T**His may suffice, in return to the first Objection : let us now proceed to the Second. 'Tis said, that the Method which I direct, is fit only to disturb the Peace of Good Men, and to fill their minds with a thousand Scruples, or perhaps, even to plunge them into Despair. This Objection being very general and roving cannot possibly be solv'd, unless we first reduce it to something more determinate and particular : as I shall endeavour to do in the following Reflections.

I. In the first place, therefore I could wish, that they who make this Exception would declare what they mean by that Peace, or Tranquility of Good Men, which they pretend the method here propos'd is capable of

disturbing; they may possibly bestow the Name of good Men, on those whom I can stile by no other but that of Sinners. They may possibly understand by that Tranquility which they attribute to them, the very same which in my judgment, passed for the most dangerous and fatal Security. If the Case be thus, as it may very possibly be, I should readily grant that my method has a tendency to disturb and interrupt such a Peace. But then, I should never allow it to be the worse; on the contrary I should value it for this very Reason.

However, in all Equity and Justice, the Objectors should be no less assur'd that the Persons discompos'd by this method are truly Good and Pious, than it is certain that the same method contains nothing but Truth; as indeed there's nothing in it but what may be demonstrably evinced by the Word of God.

II. Supposing the Persons of whom they speak to be really and constantly Good, I could wish in the second place, they would shew me how the method propos'd can give any trouble or disorder to such Men: Do they conceive it to produce this Effect of it self, and according to its own Nature; or only by accident, and as it is abused in the misapplication?

If the latter be their Sense, I very heartily joyn with them. But then, I would ask first in general, whether there be any thing so Good and Useful in its own Nature, as not to be sometimes abused? I would ask, whether supposing the abuse of a thing Good and Useful in its own Nature, to infer a necessity of suppressing and destroying it; we  
ought

ought not to abolish whatever is most important in Nature, in Society, or in Religion? In particular, I would ask whether all other Methods of gaining an assurance of our Adoption are not subject to the like inconveniencies; and whether they are not only capable of Abuse, but actually abused by many? So that the Objection, if thus understood, must condemn not only this Method, but all Methods in general; which renders it absur'd and ridiculous.

III. If they mean that this Method is in its own nature dispos'd to produce so evil an effect, they must of necessity pretend that 'tis false, and that the Characters which it makes use of, are not the Characters of God's Children. For if it contain nothing but what is true, and if the Characters which it applies do really belong to the Children of God, than 'tis impossible these pernicious effects should follow from its Nature. Every Child of God who conceives himself not to be so, is hereby in an Error, and no Error can be the product of Truth. *Ex veris nil nisi verum*, say the *Logicians*. If therefore the Method propos'd contain nothing but what is true, it can never deceive those *who* apply it as they ought.

But if they pretend that 'tis false, and the Characters that it points out, and upon which it turns, fallacious; they must give the Lie to the Holy Scripture which directs it, and to the consent of Divines who have embrac'd and put it in practice.

IV. They will say no doubt, that they do not censure these Characters as fallacious in an affirmative sense, but only negatively and exclusively taken. They will say, 'tis granted

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ed on all sides, that the Persons in whom these Characters appear, are Children of God : But still they'll maintain that many in whom they are not to be found, are yet of the same happy Denomination. They will say, these are not the Characters of God's Children in general, but of one particular Rank and Order of his Children, such as are most advanc'd in Piety, or, in a word, such as approach the nearest to perfection.

I believe this is the Notion by which the greatest part of the Objectors are sway'd ; and I confess were it true, they would have reason to impeach my Method, as naturally tending to disturb the Peace of Good Men. For if these Characters only agreed to a small number of extraordinary Proficients in goodness, all who were not of this Number, that is, the Majority of true Christians, would hence conclude without demur, , that they are not in the way to Heaven ; which must absolutely destroy all the Peace and Satisfaction of their Conscience.

But indeed, this Notion is utterly false and groundless. These Characters are not appropriated to the most Perfect and Accomplish'd in Holiness ; they belong to the Children of God universally and without exception, as evidently appears from the descriptions I have given of them. Those in whom they are wanting deserve not the Name of Weak and Imperfect Christians ; they are really Sinners Unregenerated by Grace, still expos'd to the Wrath of God, and going on in the way that leads to Destruction.

For Example, let us consider the three last of the said Characters, which are the most difficult

difficult to be found, and yet the most necessary to be sought after. What does the Holy Scripture teach us concerning them? Does it only say that those who want them are imperfect Christians? Does it not expressly declare, that they are not God's Children, that they are not in the way to Salvation, that they are irrecoverably lost without a speedy amendment of Life?

Has not St. Paul assured us, as to the fifth Character; *that neither Fornicators nor Idolators, nor Adulterers, nor Unrighteous, nor Re-* 1 Cor. vi.  
9, 10.  
*vilers, shall enter into the Kingdom of God? Has not our Saviour himself declar'd as to the sixth, if any Man hate not his Father, and Mo-* Luke xiv.  
26.  
*ther, and Wife, and Children, and Brethren, and Sisters, yea, and his own Life also; (that is, love them not in an inferior and subordinate degree to him) he cannot be his Disciple? Has not St John inform'd us, in relation to the seventh, that whosoever hateth his Brother, or even loveth him not, is in darkness, abideth in death, hath not Eternal Life abiding in him.* 1 Joh. ii. 3.

Could our Blessed Lord and his Apostles have explain'd themselves with more force and strength, or more effectually have overthrown this vain conception? For certainly those who are not the Disciples of Jesus Christ, those who shall not enter into the Kingdom of God, those who are in Darkness and in Death, those who have not Eternal Life abiding in them, are very far from being justified, or regenerate, or in a state of Grace. They are indeed, visibly in a state of Sin and Damnation.

But, for the full conviction of those who are unwilling to admit these Characters, I  
would

would only desire them to substitute others in their stead. That there are some infallible Marks to be given, is on all hands allow'd; for otherwise Peace of Conscience would be an impossible possession. 'Tis granted, that these Marks ought on the one side, to agree to all the Children of God, and on the other side, to agree to those only. Now, let such as are dissatisfied with mine, propose others of their own : Particularly, let them seek out the proper Notes of distinction between those whom we may stile *Temporary* Believers, and those who are endued with a true justifying Faith. I am persuaded, that if they do not fall in with the same which I have set down, they will either find none at all, or such as are too general, so as to extend to a great number of Sinners; or lastly, such as are too obscure, which they will be oblig'd to express by wide and Metaphorical Terms, absolutely incapable of producing any distinct Ideas, and consequently of affording any certain and determinate Knowledge. Let them make the Experiment, I doubt not but they'll pronounce in my favour.

As for Despair, I cannot apprehend the meaning of those, who would make that a Consequence of the Method I have described : Men are properly said to despair, when they perceive themselves under an impossibility of being Saved. Does this Method render any Man's Salvation impossible? Does it in any respect insinuate, either that God is not always ready to embrace with mercy all those who sincerely Repent and believe in his Son; or that the Impenitent and Unbelievers ought not to be Converted, and to come to a better Mind?

Suppose



Suppose it undeceives and disabuses many who falsely imagin'd themselves to be in the way to Eternal Happiness. Suppose it convinces them that they are in the way to Destruction ; as I confess 'tis very fit to produce this Effect : Will it follow from hence that such persons ought to be desperate ? Will it not rather follow, that they ought to do what they have fancied themselves to have done ; that is, truly and sincerely to finish their Conversion ? This is the only Inference that they ought to draw from the discovery ; the other is apparently false and irrational.

But they will say, we have done all that we are able, and how to do more we don't understand : They will say so, I confess ; but they will say it with very little regard to Truth. For, on the contrary 'tis certain, that neither they nor any besides, not even the most Perfect and Holy perform one half, or perhaps one hundredth part of that which they were able, and were obliged to do.

Let them forbear, therefore to cavil about such evident Truths, but rather endeavour seriously to profit by them, and to vanquish all the Causes of their own diquiet : as 'tis certain they may, by true Amendment if they are in a State of Sin, and by a more advanc'd Piety, if in a State of Grace.

### C H A P. XXIII.

*That the way of Examination is highly useful and beneficial.*

**B**Y what has been said on this whole Subject, it seems to be clear, that the way  
of

of Examination is very innocent, and at the same time very Useful and Advantageous, or rather absolutely necessary to those, who truly desire to understand themselves, and to know with certainty the real Estate of their own Heart, without which 'tis impossible for them to enjoy the Peace of God's Children. Wherefore all those who would be Masters of so great and precious a Good, are obliged to apply themselves to the strict Enquiry, and to conquer that natural Repugnancy and Aversion which we all have to a Labour not so uneasie and disagreeable, as it is salutary and beneficial.

We ought the rather to engage heartily in it, because it affords another very considerable Advantage besides that which was but now mention'd. It greatly contributes to our Improvement and Progress in a Religious Course. This is one of our most indispensable Duties; and we may say, that to vouchsafe us the means of fulfilling it is the principal design of God's Providence in permitting our abode upon Earth, from the time of our Conversion to our Death. 'Tis to this use that he chiefly directs all the Spiritual and Temporal Blessings which he pours down upon us. So that we cannot make a more unfuitable return to his Intention, or to our own Obligations, than by slighting so necessary and important a Care.

But what can be more proper to assist and expedite this our Advancement to Goodness, than to examine with frequency and diligence, the state of our Soul? This Advancement consists of two things: in amending the Faults we have contracted, and in procuring the

the Perfections which we want. And how is it possible we should perform either part, if we have no true sense of these Faults, and no just Idea of these Perfections? Much less, if we will not be persuaded that we are guilty of the former, or that we stand in need of the latter? And how can we be thus persuaded, if we never enquire, or look into, our selves?

There are I confess, some Faults which prevent our search, and which it seems impossible they who have the meanest Capacity, or the greatest Avocations should not discern at first view. But besides that self-love may very much diminish these, and hinder us from seeing them in their proper magnitude; there are a great number of others more retir'd and secret, and not to be discover'd but by long and serious Reflection: Nay, I am persuaded there are very many which escape the most diligent Scrutiny, and the severest Trial. According to that remarkable Text of a Great Prophet, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?* Jer. xviii. 9.

It is only therefore, by the closest Study, the nicest Observation, and the most curious Inspection, it is only by searching with care, into our most secret Thoughts, and by endeavouring to find out the true principles and motives of all our Actions that we can hope to attain, in any measure the knowledge of our selves. With this Care we shall much less understand that which passes within us, than that which is done without us: and shall live perpetually strangers to our own real Condition, that is, to the thing of the World, which it imports us to be best acquainted with.



It is by this means that we may discover our Imperfections; and having made the Discovery, may with ease apply the Cure. So that I may conclude with intreating my Readers, as they tender their own Eternal Happiness, to apply themselves as frequently as possible to this necessary Task, and firmly to believe that they can undertake nothing either with greater justice and reason, or with more solid Benefit and Use.

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**FINIS.**

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